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**Voices of selves: the lives of six
older lesbians and gay men and
their negotiated making of the
self**

**Thesis submitted in pursuance of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

Social policy and criminology

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Contents

	Page number
Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vii
 Section 1 - Context making	 1
 Chapter 1 - Setting the context of my research	 3
1.1 Introduction	3
1.2 Structure of the thesis	4
1.3 Language and assumptions	11
1.4 The 'I' and the 'me' in this research	13
1.5 Conclusion	19
 Chapter 2 - Lives in context: Lesbian and gay lives in the early part of the twentieth century	 21
2.1 Introduction	21
2.2 The cultural and social contexts in which older lesbians and gay men were situated and lived their lives in the twentieth century	22
2.3 Research focusing on the lives of older lesbians and gay men	33

2.4	Constructing and conceptualising the 'other' as self	42
2.5	Identity and ageing	56
2.6	Conclusion	60
Chapter 3 - The context of my research practice and process.		63
3.1	Introduction	63
3.2	The application of Kenyon's framework to my research <i>practice</i>	66
3.3	My research <i>process</i> and Kenyon's ethical framework	82
3.4	Conclusion	110
Section 2 - Voices and stories		112
Chapter 4 - Voices 1: Early lives		114
4.1	Introduction	114
4.2	The voices:	115
4.2.1	Ian	115
4.2.2	Robert	123
4.2.3	Rachel	128
4.2.4	Steven	133
4.2.5	Janice	138
4.2.6	Gail	143
4.3	Conclusion	148

Chapter 5 - Voices 2: Being older	152
5.1 Introduction	152
5.2 The voices:	154
5.2.1 Ian	154
5.2.2 Robert	161
5.2.3 Rachel	167
5.2.4 Steven	173
5.2.5 Janice	179
5.2.6 Gail	184
5.3 Conclusion	189
 Section 3 - Stories of stories	 192
 Chapter 6 - Themes: The different self	 194
6.1 Introduction	194
6.2 The claim to naturalness	195
6.3 Resistance and separation.	208
6.4 Conclusion	227
 Chapter 7 - Themes: The political self	 229
7.1 Introduction	229
7.2 Intersectionality and the self	231
7.3 The social construction of femininity	245
7.4 The social construction of masculinity	260
7.5 Stories of intersecting genders	271
7.6 Conclusion	275

Chapter 8 - Themes: The ageing self	280
8.1 Introduction	280
8.2 Growing old as a negative experience	284
8.3 Age-based disassociation - 'I am not old'	290
8.4 Positive expressions of ageing	299
8.5 Transitions and continuity	301
8.6 Conclusion	305
 Chapter 9 - Developing an understanding	 307
9.1 Introduction	307
9.2 Theories of ageing	309
9.3 Conceptualising the self	317
9.4 The dialogic self	324
9.5 The monologic that is ageism	331
9.6 Towards a dialogic understanding	334
9.7 Conclusions: self-making and the dialogical self	339
9.8 Reflections	347
 Appendix A: Ethically sound research practice	 352
Appendix B: The different stages of analysis of the interviews	375
Bibliography	382

Voices of selves: the lives of six older lesbians and gay men and their negotiated making of the self

Stephen Edward Pugh

Abstract

This thesis aims to achieve an understanding of the development of sexual selves and the impact that growing older has had on the sense of self of three older lesbians and three older gay men. The research project upon which it is based involved multiple in-depth interviews that were undertaken in a two year period from 2005.

The stories that were told to me indicate that the older lesbians and gay men have been very clear about their sense of their sexual selves - they are lesbian and gay. Living their lives alongside the structures that are privileged by heteronormativity, they also constructed a clear sense of separation - they were not the same as heterosexuals and as such their very 'being' became a site of resistance. As older people, their sense of self is much more complex as they articulate their understanding of what it means to be both old and lesbian or gay. Their narratives clearly indicate that as they engaged in a process of self-making and negotiated the tensions involved in constructing the self as 'other' when they were younger so they are continuing these processes in later life.

In seeking to understand the stories about constructing the self that is an older lesbian or gay man, this thesis rejects the dominant discourses in social

gerontology and post-Enlightenment constructs of the self in favour of dialogism which is based upon very different assumptions. This approach facilitates an understanding of the self which is negotiated in dialogue that in turn has specific contexts such as time and relationships. As a consequence the focus rests with how the individual negotiates the contradictions that arise from their own understanding of what it means to be an older lesbian or gay man and in doing so construct new meanings of self.

Acknowledgements

The undertaking and production of this work has been, quite literally, life changing for me and to say that I have changed as a result may seem somewhat facile but it is a truth. I have learnt a great deal about the lives and the circumstances in which older lesbians and gay men conducted their lives. I have inevitably learnt a huge amount about the content and process of undertaking a research project which includes the philosophy of knowledge generation, the nature of truth and the practical aspects of undertaking such a project.

Invariably, there are a lot of people to thank and I do so in no particular order or hierarchy.

Professor John Clarke and Dr Jean Carabine from the Open University have acted as my supervisors and in doing so have helped, advised, challenged, guided and supported me. Our supervision sessions, which have taken place in some interesting places, were challenging, on occasions frustrating (only because they made me think about other possibilities), supportive and always warm and encouraging. I owe John and Jean a huge debt of gratitude and in part payment of which I can say that they have shown me how to supervise students.

I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to the older lesbians and gay men who allowed me to spend time with them and get to know them through talking to them. I hope that this work does justice to you and the lives that you have lived. I can remember spending part of the long hot summer of 2006 talking to 'Steven' about his life; at that time he was very well and looking forward to the rest of his life. However, shortly after I had finished interviewing him, he collapsed at home and died in

hospital from a brain tumour. Thank you, 'Steven', for letting me spend time with you.

Friends are and have been very important to me throughout the period of undertaking this work and each of them has participated in different ways at different times. I am not going to name names for fear of missing somebody out - but from me to you - thank you.

Whilst I have been undertaking this research, another death has occurred - that of my father - who experienced a short illness and whilst we knew that he was terminally ill, he died unexpectedly. His death, and the context and meaning that we as a family have attributed to it, has left me in even greater admiration of him not least because he clearly loved my mum. I have always been close to my mum, who has throughout my life supported me in all my different adventures including this work, which I hope will make her proud - thank you and I love you.

The University of Salford, my employer, has both afforded me the opportunity to undertake this work and supported me through it. Inevitably there are a large number of people to thank, which I will not do individually again for fear of missing somebody out - but again thank you.

Section 1 - Context making

In order to tell the story of my research, this thesis is divided into three sections which, in turn, reflect the process of story telling. Thus the first section places the story of the research in context both in terms of how lives were lived and in terms of how my research was undertaken. The second section concentrates on the voices of and the stories told by the older lesbians and gay men about their earlier lives, their experiences about being older people and their hopes for the future. The final section focuses on understanding the meaning of the stories told by exploring the themes that emerged from analysis of the interviews. In terms of telling a story, this thesis sets the context of the story, tells the story and seeks to understand the meaning of the story that has been told.

Section 1 contains three chapters through which I establish the context of my research. Chapters 1 and 3 are very much about my voice and reflect my own context in approaching and undertaking the research. Chapter 2 situates my own understanding of the social context in which lesbians and gay men in general were constructed, constituted and lived their lives, from which a number of themes and processes are illustrated that become important in the understanding of the stories told by the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research. These themes and processes reoccur throughout this work and relate to negotiating the tensions that are inherent in the presentation of the self and self-making.

Negotiating the tensions between the self as 'other' in a heteronormative environment that strongly privileges heterosexuality as the natural and the species norm constructs dynamic and fluid selves. The stories that have been told to me are about the embodiment of individual self-making and negotiation through which the self as 'other' achieves meaning.

By the end of this section, my hope is that the 'I' that is 'me' within this thesis is clear and transparent. On this basis, the presentation of the voices of the older lesbians and gay men in Section 2 and the understanding of the stories in Section 3 can be clearly understood in terms of the political and personal influences that have constructed me as the 'other'.

Chapter 1 - Setting the context of my research

1.1 Introduction.

The aims of this thesis and the research project upon which it is based is to achieve an understanding of the impact that growing older has had on the sense of self of a small group of older lesbians and gay men. The study involved multiple in-depth interviews with three older lesbians and three older gay men who were living in the north of England. The interviews, undertaken in a two year period from 2005, concentrated on the meaning that the older lesbians and gay men attributed to key events in the development of their sexual selves and on whether, and in what way, being an older person has changed that sense of self.

Establishing meaning involves listening and hearing the voices of those who are telling the stories of their lives. These narratives are about the meaning the older lesbians and gay men as individuals attach to their sense of self and how they each negotiated the tensions that are involved in self-making particularly when that self is defined and regarded as the 'other'. These are also stories about how they continue to negotiate the making of self within the context of being an older person.

The genesis of this study rests with my own background as a gay man professionally, personally and politically interested in the social construction of later life. Throughout the period of this research, I too have aged and crossed a significant age-related milestone at the age of fifty which meant that, in terms of the official rubric, I had become an older gay man. My interest in the lives of older lesbians and gay men has raised many questions for me which were informed by

my own experiences of being a gay man, of being 'other'. These questions were premised on my own assumptions that being lesbian or gay in the earlier part of the twentieth century must have been very difficult given that the reaction, both social and legal, to lesbians or gay men was so severe. Specifically, these questions were:

- How difficult was it growing up and being lesbian and gay through that period?
- How did they cope, with this reaction to them?
- What impact did this have on them?

Aware that my own assumptions were underpinning these questions, I formulated broader questions related to how older lesbians and gay men developed a sense of themselves as being different or 'other' and how this difference is made manifest in later life. The questions that were informing my research began to emerge as:

- How did older lesbians and gay men develop a sense of themselves and who they were when they were younger? and
- What impact has being an older person had on that sense of self?

1.2 Structure of the thesis

In order to address these questions this thesis has been structured to reflect both the process and outcomes of my research as well as an understanding that the stories that have been told to me have contexts which are relevant to the self in the present. In conceptualising lives in a context which has a present, a past and a

future, this work has been informed by the epistemological foundations of the paradigm that is qualitative research and, in particular, the narrative turn to research which explores lived experiences in order to understand social meaning and social action from the perspective of the self.

In context making, the theme for the first three chapters of this work, this first chapter situates the broader influences which established the focus of my research and in doing so explores the assumptions that informed the formulation of the initial research questions. These questions emerged, developed and were informed by my own story as a gay man whose life course has run alongside, although, in terms of time because I am younger, slightly after the life courses of the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research. The reflexive account - *'The I and the me in this research'* - situates my life and establishes how this has influenced the focus of my research, the manner in which it was conducted and how the analysis and interpretation of the stories that were told to me were and have been understood. The final context making act for this chapter is to set a common understanding in terms of the use of language which is not simply a matter of a semantic pedantry on my part but is rather a much more proactive and political act based on an understanding that language is a vehicle that conveys inherent power and therefore is an instrument of oppression. In choosing certain words over others the meaning that I derive from them and their context brings alive the life that I have lived in the making of the 'I' that is 'me'.

Given that my research involves an exploration of the earlier lives of the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research in order to establish the meaning that they attached to the development of their sexual selves, it is I feel important to place these lives within a broader context which reflects the social

environment in which they were living. Chapter 2 explores the broader situation in which lesbians and gay men were situated in the earlier part of the twentieth century and the narratives of other lesbians and gay men who were living and being the 'other' during this period. The chapter also explores the concepts that have been employed to construct and constitute both the sexual and the aged 'other'.

In the final chapter of this context setting section, Chapter 3 outlines the process through which I undertook my research and the practices that I adopted and applied in my interaction with the older lesbians and gay men. In undertaking the research process, my approach was to ensure that my research activity valued and respected both the individuals and the stories that they were telling me.

Kenyon's (1996) ethical framework for undertaking biographical research with older people became the structure through which I was able to ensure that these activities were rooted in, and based upon, very clear ethical foundations.

In the second section of this thesis, the voices and the stories of the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research are told. Chapter 4 explores the narratives and stories related to their earlier lives with a particular focus on the events that occurred as they developed a sense and made meaning of their sexual selves as 'other'. The chapter is structured to present each individual person's narrative voice ensuring that the events and associated meanings are clearly heard and reflect the importance that they attributed to them as part of their own understanding of the development of their sexual selves. In a similar manner, Chapter 5 draws directly on their narrative voices in order to identify their stories about being an older person. These stories are necessarily situated in the very recent past and in the here-and-now because I was seeking their own

understanding of what being older means to them as individuals. The chapter also explores their feelings about what they think the future holds for them, which on the whole is set within the imagery of decline, dependency and death, which, in turn, reflects the common understanding of later life articulated through ageism.

The third section is about the stories that emerged from their narratives as a consequence of the thematic analysis of the interviews and understanding these stories. Three broad themes emerged which I have conceptualised as:

- The different self (Chapter 6)
- The political self (Chapter 7)
- The ageing self (Chapter 8)

In Chapter 6 the narratives of the older lesbians and gay men assert their sense of their sexual self in two expressions: the first being their identification that they are lesbian or gay. This positive assertion is made through a claim to naturalness and the assertion that being lesbian or gay is a natural state for them. Whilst this claim to naturalness is a common feature of all their narratives there is a very clear gendered difference in the basis of this claim. The men provide stories which for them indicate that they have known that they are gay from a very early age, in fact pre-pubescent, and that this early emergence is presented as a measure of the fact that they are 'real' gay men. For the women, the naturalness of their sexual selves is located later in the life course and is associated with their first kiss with a woman. It is from this act that they assert that they knew they were lesbian because the kiss felt so natural.

The second expression of their sexual selves as different involves their experiences of living their lives as the 'other', which is made manifest through expressed homophobia¹ and heteronormativity². In this part of the chapter their narratives articulate that, in being lesbian or gay, they are not the same as other people and that they are, in fact separate, from those others. Establishing themselves as 'other' involves the processes of negotiating the tensions and influences that invariably are associated with self-making in conditions of severe reactions to the expression of the 'other'. Equally, I argue that in being lesbian or gay they are the embodiment of resistance as in the making of the self they resist the dominance of heterosexuality. Chapter 6 therefore focuses on their stories in which they are clearly asserting that they are lesbians or gay men and that the very act of being means that they are not the same as other people.

In both aspects of this chapter, the broader themes of negotiating the tensions involved in the construction of self, the meaning of that self and self making are evident. Asserting that their sexual selves are natural expressions of sexuality, the older lesbians and gay men inevitably have had to negotiate their sense of sexual self as different and as 'other' and in doing so each established a different way of 'being' lesbian and gay. Equally, in this act of 'being' they are the embodied resistance of the dominant norms of sexuality. Having negotiated a sense of their sexual selves, the chapter then illustrates the process of self-making in terms of how the negotiated self is constructed as being the 'other' which is both different and is made manifest through their lived experiences.

¹ Kimmel et al. (2006:10) define homophobia as '*...the irrational fear of homosexuals.*'

² Schilt and Westbrook (2009:441) cite Kitzinger (2005) in their definition of heteronormativity which is '*...the suite of cultural, legal and institutional practices that maintain normative assumptions that there are two and only two genders, that gender reflects biological sex, and that only sexual attraction between these "opposite" genders is natural and acceptable.*'

Having established that in their narratives they are clearly asserting the nature of their sexual selves as different, Chapter 7 explores how, as gendered individuals, they articulate their understanding of themselves as men and women and gay men and gay women. The chapter explores the construction of both femininity and masculinity and how as lesbians and gay men they situate themselves within these constructs. The women all share a similar and clear sense of themselves as women and two of them maintain a very strong political sense of the position of women in society. The men, however, are much less clear about their political understanding of their gendered selves other than that in being gay men they are placed in a hierarchy of masculinities and regard themselves as being perceived by other men as not 'real' men. In terms of an interaction of genders, the men robustly reject the presence of women in their lives which also applies to their anticipation of their futures when they, in a gendered stereotype, reject the idea of women caring for them, preferring instead to be cared for by younger men. In contrast, the women do not reject the presence of men in their lives which may, in part, be a reflection of the fact that they have sons with whom they are in regular contact but, equally, this may reflect the hierarchical basis of gender and the differences in power which are exercised through such hierarchies.

Through the articulation of gender, this chapter is also illustrating the processes of negotiating the construct of self, the meaning of self and self-making within the context of both personal manifestations of what it means to be a man or a woman and in the broader structural arrangements in which gendered artifices are constructed and are given voices. Whilst there are clear hierarchical differences between these social constructs, the differences within the constructs result in both the men and the women engaging in the process of self-making as they

articulate their own meaning of what it means to be a man who is gay and a woman who is lesbian.

In Chapters 6 and 7, the older lesbians and gay men clearly articulate their sense of selves as lesbians and gay men and as gendered men and women. In being very clear about the nature of their sexual selves they also clearly reject the normative assumptions of heterosexuality and as a consequence they have been engaged in a process of 'self-making' - of developing their own sense of being a man or a woman, of being lesbian or gay. However, their sense of self as an older person is much more complex. Chapter 8 explores this complexity through the voices and stories that they are telling about themselves and how they are negotiating self-making as older lesbians and gay men situated within the discourses of age and ageism. The complicated nature of the stories reflects their own negotiation of the tensions involved in their understanding of what it means to be an older person. Thus, in their stories they situate themselves as older people but equally dissociate themselves from other older people and other older lesbians and gay men. Their stories contain references to the positioning devices of the 'denial of ageing' and the 'mask of ageing' but their stories are even more complex than the simple manifestation and articulation of these positions and we will clearly see them negotiating what it means to be the self that is old.

Having established in Chapter 8 that as individuals they have a very complex relationship with their selves as older people, Chapter 9 seeks to understand the meaning that they attribute to being an older lesbian or gay man. The chapter begins with an acknowledgement that, during the research process, the focus changed and was refined as a consequence of trying to make sense of the stories that were being told to me. Social gerontological theories and classical and

Enlightenment constructs of self are explored and discounted as unhelpful in achieving an understanding of these stories. Instead the construct of dialogism is identified as being much more constructive in providing meaning to these stories as it focuses on the dialogical processes of negotiating the inherent tensions involved with self-making.

As individuals, they have, through their life courses, rejected the dominant discourse of heteronormativity and, in doing so, engaged in the process of self-making as they negotiated and constructed a clear understanding that they as the 'other' are gay men and women. As older people, they are continuing to negotiate the meaning of their selves and in doing so are engaged in self-making as older lesbians and gay men.

1.3 Language and assumptions

The subject of this thesis necessarily affords the opportunity for different political and theoretical meanings to be conveyed through the use of language. Given that this work is premised upon the interpretation of stories and the development of meaning in order to achieve understanding, it is also important to establish a shared and common understanding of the language and ideas that are contained within this work.

Throughout this thesis I have referred to people who are in later life as 'older people' as this term infers a relationship rather than relying on the term 'the elderly' which is derived from population categories. In this respect I am reflecting the work of Bytheway (1995) who comments that:

'In particular we should abandon the word "elderly" and begin to use a relative rather than an absolute age vocabulary.'

(Bytheway 1995:125)

The term ageing is generally regarded as being synonymous with older people or, in its description of a process, is restricted to an experience that only applies to older people. I have used the term ageing to describe the process of growing older which occurs to each of us throughout the life course and arguably begins at birth.

The terms gay and lesbian have been employed rather than 'homosexual' as the former confer much more positive images than the latter which has been part of the oppression of lesbians and gay men for decades. The focus in the research on older lesbians and gay men and the exclusion of older bisexuals and transgendered people primarily reflects the issues associated with the development and perception of sexual self as 'other'. In this respect, the sense of self as 'other' is much more disputed and less easily defined in the individual who defines themselves as bisexual. Given the emphasis on sexuality as the defining focus of self, older transgendered people are not included because of the primacy given to the transition of gender in the construction and understanding of self.

Throughout this work, I have made frequent use of the word 'self' and its plural conjugation 'selves'. At a semantic level there are many meanings of this word which not least infer identity, character and characteristic, consciousness of being and awareness. The word also has a long and contested history when associated with particular philosophical constructs and this is explored in greater detail in Chapter 9. In using the word 'self', I am acknowledging that the 'self' to which I am referring to is:

- Embodied and thereby boundaried,
- Is made manifest in relationships with other selves,
- Has a relationship with structure,
- Is agentic and is therefore both aware and is a site of decision making.

My use of the word 'self' reflects many influences but essentially I am referring to an individual who has an awareness of their place in time and space, of their needs, and that they make individual decisions within a context of structure and the relationships in which they are situated.

1.4 The 'I' and the 'me' in this research

This reflexive account will focus on those experiences and the aspects of who I am that are pertinent to this research. In doing so, I will attempt to produce an account that interweaves these experiences into a coherent narrative or story that provides an insight into how I view and account for the social meaning of my life as a life that has been, and is being, lived. Van Manen (1990) comments that:

'Writing is a reflexive activity that involves the totality of our physical and mental being. To write means to write myself, not in a narcissistic sense, but in a deep collective sense.'

(Van Manen 1990:132)

In writing this narrative, my starting point is my sexuality and the self that is a gay man. Being a gay man, however, is not one articulation of a recently recognised identity but rather a complex interaction between life experiences, political beliefs,

social positions and the intersection of broader social processes all of which produce unique insights into what it means to be gay in a heteronormative society. Quintessentially this is, in fact, the articulation of the 'other' and the performance associated with being the 'other' (see, Goffman (1982), Ahmed (2007), Davies (2008), Jagger (2008)).

I was first aware of an attraction to my own sex relatively early in my life which strongly reflects the experiences of the older gay men who participated in this research. However, my sense of being different emerged in my teenage years through my own actions, the use of language and the actions of others. Through my own actions I had become sexually active exclusively with people of my own sex and this in turn afforded me considerable pleasure. Equally, in this period I became aware that being attracted to the same gender meant that the person was a homosexual, a queer or a poof and that these words were in fact describing me. Through the actions of some others, I was aware that being attracted to the same gender was not a good thing. References in conversations to people who were 'homosexual' were made in hushed tones as if a sin was being articulated and I took from this the need, the imperative, to keep this attraction and my activities to myself. My feelings about needing to hide my sexuality are reflected in the narratives of the older gay men and this is, in part, a particular expression of being gay men living through the same period of time - the 1960s and 70s. Whilst this was a period of significant change in social attitudes towards such issues as divorce and abortion, in respect of lesbians and gay men these were not times of particularly liberal thought, and whilst the legal status of gay men changed in 1967

with the Sexual Offences Act³ the atmosphere in which we were living our lives remained hostile.

By the time I had left secondary school in 1975 I did have a distinct sense that I was different and that this difference had names - I was a poof, queer, gay, 'homosexual'. I began, through work and my social life, to engage in very different environments with a large range of people from the same and very different backgrounds than my own. I learnt that I needed to manage the presentation of myself and how I was perceived by others which resulted in me separating and compartmentalising the different aspects of my life. These processes or techniques of managing the self as 'other' are also reflected in the stories that the older gay men were to tell me some thirty years later.

During this period (the late 1970s) I became more socially and geographically mobile which afforded me the opportunity to meet men for the purposes of having sex. These engagements were opportunistic and casual and very rarely repeated or longer lasting than the time in which we occupied the same geographic space. My late teens and early twenties could be characterised as having longstanding relationships with friends, going out with them and having fun; as being part of a family and as having work-based relationships. There was also another part of my life - a secret or private part - in which I gave and received pleasure through the act of having sex with men.

Perhaps the most significant relationship I had through my childhood, teenage years and early adulthood was with my grandmother who died in February 1994 when I was thirty six. All through my childhood we would visit her every two weeks

³ The Sexual Offences Act partially decriminalised gay male sexual activity setting a very clear age of consent at 21. The sex act had to be consenting, in private and involve no more than two people.

on a Sunday and every Christmas Day was spent with her. I have many happy memories of playing in the streets around my grandmother's house or exploring the area in which she lived. When I had passed my driving test and got my first car in the mid 1970s, I used to travel to visit my grandmother every other weekend to take her shopping or to take her to visit her friends and our relatives and during these trips we would just talk and laugh. Over this period we did things together and developed a very close relationship; she had always been important to me but became even more important. As an older woman, my grandmother's life reflected the broader position in which older people were placed, as one by one her friends died and her health became poor, resulting in increasing levels of dependence and isolation. Being part of her life and observing these changes began an awakening for me of the political position in which older people were placed.

I had not articulated my attraction to men at home, to my grandmother, at work or with my friends partly because this was an intensely private part of my life, partly for fear of the repercussions and partly because I enjoyed doing what I was doing in the manner in which I was doing it. However, in my early twenties I had developed a relationship which lasted many years with a man who lived in another city and spent some very happy times visiting him.

In my mid twenties - the mid 1980s - I decided to leave my employment and go to university primarily because I was deeply unhappy at work and by this time I had met people who had been to university and had enjoyed the experience. The subject choice and the location of my studies were all informed by my understanding of my sense of self. My unhappiness at work rested within a deep sense of injustice as the department head regularly articulated and acted on his racist and sexist beliefs which I firmly believed were wrong. Leaving work and

moving to a different location - the major conurbation that is Manchester - afforded me a new start and new opportunities which included access to a large gay centre. I chose to study social policy at Manchester University which allowed me to explore and deepen my understanding of injustice in a place that would allow me to be gay. Whilst at Manchester University I undertook voluntary work in a day centre for older people who experienced depression and dementia and this awakened an interest in social work as a profession. For me, at this time, social work provided the vehicle to challenge and fight the oppression and injustice to which older people were exposed. I left Manchester with a good undergraduate degree and moved to Nottingham to embark on postgraduate professional social work training.

When I first went to university, which necessitated leaving home and all of the people in my life at that time - which included a relationship with a man. it was being with my grandmother that I would miss the most. Whilst I was not able to be with her as frequently as I had, would ring her regularly to find out how she was and to just chat. My grandmother had her first stroke in 1992 and was admitted to hospital never to return home. The final stroke, which ended her life, left her in a coma and I was able to visit her within a few days. Family mythology maintains that she was waiting for me to visit before she died. She remains a constant feature of my life and is regularly referred to in conversations with my mother and my uncle (her son) and is mentioned regularly in my teaching. Whilst my grandmother was never badly treated by the services that were in place to support her, she stoically resigned herself to never going home again after the first stroke and I always felt a degree of injustice on her behalf about her situation.

In the late 1980s I began working as a social worker with older people in a metropolitan borough in Greater Manchester. I loved working and being with older people, I loved listening to the stories of their lives - the extraordinary and the ordinary - to the older woman who was on the ship behind the SS Lusitania when it was torpedoed; to the woman who worked as a prostitute in a particular part of Manchester which has long since been redeveloped; to the older man whose recipe for a long life was to drink a pint of cow's blood every week and to the woman who left me with a lot of explaining to do when she referred to a police sergeant as a 'fat bastard' and happily walked off giggling, leaving me open-mouthed with the sergeant. I had developed a strong political commitment to older people and argued my case vehemently for better resources, better services and improved quality of services.

By this time I was deeply in love, in a long term cohabiting relationship and 'out' in every dimension of my life. As I moved to work in higher education my identity was firmly and publicly visible - an out gay man, in a relationship, passionately politically committed to older people. I enjoyed being at that time the only 'out' gay man in the School, I enjoyed being different, I enjoyed being special but having achieved this internal and external state the world around me began to change. The late 1990s brought a human rights agenda to the political arena and suddenly as a gay man I had human rights and I was to be treated equally. Significantly for me, I was also no longer different or special; I had become through no action on my part the same as everybody else and I missed being the 'other' that has so long been a part of my life and who I am. As I have grown older in a changed and changing world I remain deeply committed to older people including older lesbians and gay men. The opportunity to undertake this research has brought together my

life experiences as a gay man and my political commitment to older people at a time when I am now classed as an older gay man.

In undertaking this research I have been very struck by how similar the story of the development of my sexual self was to the stories being told to me by the older gay men. However, in sharp contrast, I was also struck by how very different my story appeared to be to the stories that were told by the older lesbians. The convergence that we all share rests in the construction of each of us as the 'other' and how in self-making we have negotiated and continue to negotiate the tensions involved in make sense and meaning of ourselves.

1.5 Conclusion

In June 2009, I was fortunate to be able to listen to an organ concert in the Lutheran Cathedral in Riga, Latvia. I became aware that the audience was overwhelmingly made up of older people and I found myself musing that **they** were the product of post-war welfare systems that had provided the income that would enable **them** to travel and also that **they** were the recipients of health systems that ensured that **they** were healthy - as far as I was aware. Suddenly, I realised that in fact I was sitting with my peers and my sense of self was shocked not by the association but by the fact that I had dissociated myself from my peers. Just outside the cathedral, there was a group of teenagers loudly enjoying skateboarding and having fun. Their noise and their activity presented me with a disjuncture as I became irritable with their presence. On this day, and in a short space of time. I had articulated my sense of self as a young man enjoying the company of a group of older people and had become annoyed with the exuberance of youth and had taken on the mantle of a 'grumpy old man'.

In reflecting on these events I was intrigued by the processes that facilitated my dissociation or separation from both groups. How is it possible to maintain this disjuncture in one person - how could I be both expressions of self and still maintain a sense of coherence of self? This is a story which is about an older gay man and his perception of his self. As such this personal experience goes to the very heart of my research and the questions that emerged from the study.

Chapter 2 - Lives in context: Lesbian and gay lives in the early part of the twentieth century

2.1 Introduction

The six older lesbians and gay men whose stories are the foundations of my research were born in a fifteen year period from 1930 to 1945. Within their life courses there have occurred in most western societies very significant changes in both the status of, and attitude towards, lesbians and gay men as evidenced by the much greater visibility and presence of lesbians and gay men in every aspect of society. In the United Kingdom in 1930, it was illegal for a man to have sex with another man and would remain so in England and Wales⁴ for another thirty seven years. Although not facing criminal sanctions, lesbians faced severe social reactions with the potential loss of access to any children that they might have and disruptions in their lives through divorce and/or rejection from friends and family. In contrast to the circumstances of the earlier part of the twentieth century, it is now illegal to discriminate against lesbians and gay men. These developments are made manifest in the life course of the six older lesbians and gay men as they have lived through these changes and have negotiated and re-negotiated their sense of self in a process of self-making within significantly changing social, legal and political contexts. The older lesbians and gay men, by their very 'being', become an embodiment of the lived experience of social change.

In establishing the contexts in which lesbians and gay men were placed in the early part of the twentieth century, this chapter will explore how these lives were

⁴ Whilst the Sexual Offences Act 1967 partially decriminalised gay male sex in England and Wales such activity remained criminal offences in Scotland until 1980 and in Northern Ireland until 1982.

lived by examining both individual stories and broader social commentaries. The stories and commentaries clearly indicate that, despite the social and legal position, lesbians and gay men not only existed in the early part of the twentieth century, they also lived lives both separate from and integrated with, the broader society. In reflecting their own circumstances and the environment in which they were living, individual lesbians and gay men established meanings of self within a context of negotiation and self-making giving rise to the inevitable diversity of being lesbian or gay.

The chapter will then explore the understandings that researchers made of the lives of older lesbians and gay men, and how lesbians and gay men were constituted and constructed in both the academy and as expressed in the lives of lesbians and gay men as they made sense of the meaning of their sexual selves. Finally, I will briefly examine the dominant images and ideas that are associated with understanding the meaning of later life and of being an older person. These ideas and images will be revisited in Chapters 8 and 9.

2.2 The cultural and social contexts in which older lesbians and gay men were situated and lived their lives in the twentieth century.

This section of the chapter situates the lives of older lesbians and gay men whose stories are contained in this research into a social, political and cultural context. In doing so, I wish to highlight a disjuncture between the official rubric of the state which up to the late 1960s criminalised, ostracised and denied lesbians and gay men and the diversity of the reality for many lesbians and gay men. The combination of the works of Chauncey (1994), Hamer (1996) and Houlbrook (2005) and the individual narratives produced by Cant (2008), Classen (2005) and

Clunis et al. (2005) draw together an understanding of the context of the lives of lesbians and gay men prior to 1967 and illustrate how individual lesbians and gay men lived their lives.

The works of Chauncey (1994) and Houlbrook (2005) provide social, political and cultural analyses of the circumstances that existed in both New York and London for gay men covering the periods 1890 to 1940 and 1918 to 1957 respectively.

Chauncey's work has relevance for this thesis because it provides evidence that the circumstances that Houlbrook has identified in London through this period were also being replicated in New York, which would also suggest that these conditions were a feature of major urban areas in both North America and the United Kingdom. Both of these works indicate that these metropolitan centres were places in which gay men, and, by association, lesbians lived and met each other, formed relationships and, in various expressions established their differences to the rest of society. The existence of lesbian and gay venues, such as public houses, coffee houses, parks and private clubs prior to 1967 was in direct contradiction to the official reaction which criminalised gay male sexual activity and subjected lesbians to severe social reaction.

Despite their illegal status, gay men continued to meet other men for the purposes of sexual contact, and for support and relationships in a variety of settings. These were, on the whole, somewhat transitory in nature as an individual venue would become known as a meeting place, become popular and develop a reputation which in turn attracted the attention of the police. With increasing police attention, the popularity and visibility of that particular venue would diminish as they were increasingly perceived to be unsafe whilst other settings grew in popularity, thereby repeating the cycle of emergence and decline with an associated

movement across urban areas. However, some settings remained consistently 'popular' as Houlbrook comments:

'...Hyde Park and Hampstead Heath stood out for their longevity and the scale of the public culture that developed within their bounds. Hyde Park, for example, had been a meeting place since 1800.'

(2005:52)

Whilst in general terms these open areas within the urban landscape were frequented by men seeking opportunities for same sex sexual contact and were also known to be places where such activity took place, Houlbrook goes on to comment that, in respect of Hyde Park, there was:

'...a distinctly queer topography that enabled their [gay men's] successful movements through the park, a matrix of functional spaces that interwove public and private in very different proportions.'

(2005: 54)

Measuring the extent of the public knowledge of such venues is very difficult to establish. However, from Houlbrook's work we can understand that there was, in fact, quite extensive knowledge about where to meet lesbians and gay men. The example below illustrates that serving soldiers not only knew about same sex activity but also knew where to engage with, and undertake, such activities whether this was for money, sex, pleasure or all three:

'When Cecil E joined the Welsh Guards in the 1920s, he thus quickly found that same-sex encounters were "talked of in the barrack room."

Immersed in this milieu, Cecil was socialised into dominant forms of masculinity and sexual and cultural practice. Shortly after enlisting another Guardsman took him to London and introduced him to some people he called 'soldier's friends. ' Cecil learned of the possibilities of homosex; blackmail and theft; the sexual, social and commercial pleasures; and masculine status that it offered.'

(Houlbrook 2005:181)

Public spaces in the first part of the twentieth century were primarily occupied by men which in turn reflects the gendered nature of society with clear distinctions being drawn between public and private spheres of life. The consequence of this as Hamer comments, was that:

'While lesbian networks were both complex and strong in the 1930s and 1940s, there were still few physical venues which the lesbian community could occupy, throughout the country lesbians continued to use what women-only spaces there were. However, from the mid 1930s the lesbian scene seems to have been much improved by the establishment of the Forum Club by Alice Williams. The Forum Club provided the same kind of social space as traditional men's clubs did, but for a female membership.'

(1996:131)

Hamer describes the Forum Club as luxurious and, with reference to Virginia Woolf's *'A room of one's own'* (published in 1929), comments that the Club was far from the female institutions described by Woolf which were 'poor and depressing' (Hamer 1996:132).

These analyses concern themselves with the major metropolitan areas which became in themselves centres that drew lesbians and gay men from much broader geographical areas because of the gay life that was already known to exist there. Whilst this 'queer diaspora' (see Patton and Sanchez-Eppler 2000 and Fortier 2002) may have led to gay men moving to the large metropolitan centres predicated on employment or the search for employment, the same opportunities were not so readily available for women in a patriarchal gendered society. Citing the example of Vita Sackville-West, her marriage to Harold Nicolson and her passionate relationships with women, Hamer (1996) comments that in the 1930s being married and a lesbian appeared to be an acceptable arrangement and, as such, some married women who engaged in same sex relationships would have moved location as their husband moved.

Chauncey (1994). Hamer (1996) and Houlbrook (2005) provide us with insights into the lives of metropolitan gay men and middle class lesbians⁵ in the early part of the twentieth century. based on both individual narratives and historical documents. The more recent turn towards narrative research facilitates the establishment of more detailed perspectives based on the lives that have been lived. Cant's (2008) work is a good example of the use of narratives in which he presents a total of twenty two narratives of lesbians and gay men living in Scotland undertaken in two distinct time periods - the first in 1993 and the second some fifteen years later in 2008. In his work there is an equal distribution of the narratives between these two time frames with eleven in each period. Of the 1993 collection, eight of the eleven narrated experiences contained some reference to

⁵ Hamer (1996) acknowledges that her work is drawn from evidence provided by middle class women.

moving from the person's place of birth and ten of the 2008 narratives equally involved some geographic relocation. However, what is not clear is whether this movement reflects the general population, the specifics of Scotland at that time, or whether the relocation was in part driven by the individual's perception of their sexual self.

Two of the narratives contained within Cant's (2008) work provide us with some particularly interesting insights into the lives of a lesbian and a gay man who were born and grew up far away from metropolitan centres. Louis McPhail was born during the Second World War on the island of Lewis which is part of the Outer Hebrides. Louis describes his life growing up as being dominated by both the church and what may be regarded as traditional island/rural ways of living: the men were involved in herring fishing and were away during the working week, returning at the weekend. The women, he describes as '...beasts of burden. It was the women's work to do the heavy work and they did it all.' (Cant 2008:51). Within this environment, dominated as it was by the church and traditional ways of life, Louis comments that:

'Gay people existed; they called them bumbodacht (emphasis in the original). That was the derogatory term but it was used for people who were very open, degraded. But it happened on the fishing boats; the young lads had it off among themselves. Once they came home at the weekend it was never spoken about, but I heard my father and the other menfolk discuss it one night after a few pints. They used to talk about one of the galleyboys, a boy of fifteen, a cook. They used to bind him with a rope and one of them used to masturbate him. They hadn't a clue that the boy was into bondage, but there was always someone

to give a helping hand.'

(Cant 2008:54)

Louis recounts that his first same sex sexual contact was with a friend when they were both fourteen. A year or so later he is having sex with a first cousin who was some five years older than him. His friend uses the term 'brown hatters' in reference to their sexual activity which was the first time that Louis had heard that phrase, and Louis also makes a reference to wearing suede shoes as an indicator of effeminacy.

The other narrative that is of particular interest is that of Marina who was born in 1969 in Lerwick on the Shetland Islands. Marina describes having crushes on other girls and women and whilst never talking about these feelings, she 'came out' at the age of 19 years and had a relationship with another woman in Lerwick for several years. Marina also recounts that earlier her mother had 'come out' to her in reference to a woman with whom Marina herself had developed a close relationship.

I have chosen these two narratives from Cant's (2008) work because they illustrate that, whilst lesbian and gay sexuality was either subject to severe sanctions or illegal, it is clear that same sex activity was known about, was the subject of discussion, was normalised among particular groups of men and women, that slang words or phrases were being employed descriptively and that these behaviours and activities were taking place far from the metropolitan centres.

Louis' narrative also contains reference to the press reaction to the Wolfenden Report which was published in 1957. Louis describes how, at the age of fifteen, he liked reading the *Daily Record* but that:

'All of a sudden the blooming Daily Records (emphasis in the original) were going on top of the larder. Right at the very top and I couldn't think why I couldn't see them. This day when my mother was out I stood on an enamel bread bin and I reached the very top and I took down the Daily Record. It was all about homosexuality - legal or illegal. It was the Wolfenden Report and it was my first contact with the word - homosexual.'

(Cant 2008:54)

The Report of the Wolfenden Committee⁶ received widespread media coverage when it was published in 1957. A year later in 1958 a group of what Houlbrook (2005) refers to as 'middle class' men established the Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS) which had the explicit intention of ensuring that the Committee's recommendations were enacted into law which eventually occurred in 1967. Over time, the HLRS emerged as the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), an organisation that features in the narratives of two of the men who participated in my research.

The largest single source of printed or published material that would have been relatively easily available to both lesbians and gay men would have been the reporting of the criminal prosecutions of gay men. Such prosecutions would have included men who were prosecuted locally, and who featured in local newspapers.

⁶ Formally known as the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution which was set up in 1954

Houlbrook (2005), in undertaking an examination of the proceedings of the Metropolitan Magistrates Courts and the City of London Justice Rooms from 1917 to 1957, identifies the number of cases in five year intervals presented to the courts which involved 'queer incidents' which are defined as:

'... a single incident in which the police apprehended one or more men who were subsequently charged with importuning, gross indecency, indecent assault, buggery or a bylaw indecency offence.'

(Houlbrook 2005:274)

Houlbrook's analysis indicates a steady and inexorable rise in prosecutions from 1917 (67 prosecutions) reaching a peak in 1947 (637 prosecutions) and then dropping back through 1952 to 1957. Whilst the numbers of prosecutions are not in themselves enormous, although probably experienced as personally devastating by the men who were being prosecuted, they are significant in order of magnitude representing a difference in the rate of prosecutions from in 1917, one gay man to fourteen gay men a week in 1947. However, there were two particular prosecutions which attracted national attention and which featured in the national and local press being widely reported and discussed. The first of these was the trial of Oscar Wilde which resulted in his conviction in 1895 for gross indecency and being sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour. In the years 1953 and 1954 the second major trial saw the prosecution of Lord Montague of Beaulieu, Peter Wildeblood and Michael Pitt Rivers and their subsequent conviction for indecency.

In 1928, the publishers of Radclyffe Hall's 'The Well of Loneliness' were prosecuted in the United Kingdom for obscenity. This trial and the subsequent

appeal focused on artistic rather than sexual freedom and attracted noted commentators and artisans of the period. D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West were present during the trial whilst others such as Bernard Shaw, Noel Coward and E.M. Forster were supporters of the publishers (Vargo 2003). The trial and the appeal resulted in the book being prohibited from publication in the United Kingdom until 1949 when it was republished by Falcon Press and sold at 30 shillings when the average book cost 10 shillings (Hamer 1996).

Whilst lesbians and gay men in the United Kingdom would have found it extremely difficult to obtain a copy of *The Well of Loneliness* during the 1930s and 40s, the significance of the trial was the prominence and public reporting it gave to same sex desire and, in particular, same sex desire between women. In a perverse way, the publicity which surrounded the prosecution of gay men acted for other gay men to affirm the presence of men who desired men for sexual purposes whilst confirming the illegality and 'unnaturalness' of such desire. As a consequence, gay men and also lesbians had to learn to negotiate the conditions of private desire and public repudiation and condemnation, engaging actively in self-making and the management of the presentation of self.

Whilst these are famous legal prosecutions, a notorious scandal was rocking the British establishment in 1951 as two diplomats Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean disappeared and two weeks later emerged within the Soviet Union as Soviet spies. Whilst the establishment was initially concerned that Burgess and Maclean had been kidnapped or had become involved in some unfortunate accident:

'...the truth began to emerge, and it was excruciating: the statesmen, it seems were actually KGB operatives who, for twenty years, had been

supplying the Kremlin with mounds of top secret intelligence material smuggled out of Britain and the United States.'

(Vargo 2003:83)

The disclosure that they were also both gay men compounded the political and public reaction to the scandal which by this time was disrupting British and American political relationships and led to intensified scrutiny of gay men on both sides of the Atlantic.

Norton (2009), in his essay on the suppression of the existence of lesbians and gay men, comments that public expressions of art such as the theatre, cinema and television were the subject of censorship aimed at suppressing 'queer themes'.

Norton notes that the Hays Code of the American Film Industry was a voluntary scheme of self censorship which between 1930 and 1961 'specifically forbade any representations of either male or female homosexuality' (2009:19). He goes on to comment that this period of self censorship resulted in material being re-written to ensure that individual storylines presented heterosexual rather than lesbian or gay references. In some instances, Hollywood re-wrote history to ensure that the only message was the dominance of heterosexuality. The most obvious example of a mass circulation film that did address gay male issues and was not the subject of the Hays Code because it was made in the United Kingdom, is the 1961 film '*Victim*', starring Dirk Bogarde and Sylvia Syms, in which Bogarde plays a married lawyer who engages in gay male sex which becomes the subject of an attempt at financial extortion that is, in turn, resisted. The film explores the effect that has on his life. This British film was made after the Wolfenden Report was distributed but some six years before the partial liberalisation in England and Wales of gay male

sexual contact in 1967. As such the film was groundbreaking for its content, the time and the social conditions in which it was shown.

In both the social and cultural analyses and the contemporary commentaries on the lives of lesbians and gay men prior to 1967, we can see that the dominant discourses of heteronormativity and homophobia operated to both suppress, control and punish lesbians and gay men as well as to regulate, support and validate heterosexuality and heterosexuals. For individual lesbians and gay men there was a price to be paid, as Houlbrook (2005) has pointed out in terms of the number of prosecutions in London, many gay men were in fact punished by being sent to prison, fined or subjected to attempts at 'treatment' whilst many lesbians experienced divorce, poverty and the loss of custody of their children. For both lesbians and gay men, the reaction of their families may have also involved rejection, thereby reflecting a duality of reaction from both the police and the courts and from family members. The costs for both lesbians and gay men were clearly very high and yet men and women resisted the reaction of the social structures through their agency by continuing to meet people of their same sex, for sex as well as for social support and relationships.

2.3 Research focusing on the lives of older lesbians and gay men

This section of the chapter, again within the overall objective of context setting, explores the commentaries that researchers were making about the lives of older lesbians and gay men and, in doing so, illustrates how the lesbian and gay self was being perceived as 'other'. The late 1960s, following the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act 1967 in England and Wales and the Stonewall Riots in New York in 1969, represent not only significant change in both attitude towards, and

the status of, lesbians and gay men, the period also initiated a period of considerable research related to this newly legitimised social group. The research undertaken in the early period, the 1970s and 80s, tended to be divided in its attention between exploring issues related to lesbians and those of gay men. This division of focus also represented a tendency to draw on differing paradigmatic influences with the work related to lesbians being informed by feminist approaches and much more narrative and life story oriented, whilst the research related to gay men was much more quantitative in approach. By the late 1990s the differences in the epistemological approaches towards research related to older lesbians and gay men had very much evened out, with most of the research now being narrative or life story focused.

There is a considerable amount of literature available relating to older lesbians and gay men although most of this material is not immediately visible. On the whole, this research is not gathered within standard texts on ageing or sexuality and, as such, references to older lesbians and gay men do not find normative expression within any particular disciplinary area. Whilst Weinberg in 1969 'discovered' gay ageing, Jacobs et al. comment that the broad range of gerontology texts:

'...fail[s] to mention elderly [sic] gay men and lesbians or provide little discussion of the concerns about ageing. This omission reflects the systematic ignoring of and subsequent exclusion of older gay, lesbian and bisexual populations in mainstream gerontology.'

(1999:4)

Andrews (1999) argues that, when attempting to conceptualise the position of older people in general in our society, if our starting point is that ageing is a

problem then our end point in terms of theoretical constructs will reflect this and our theories inevitably describe ageing as a problem. This comment is made manifest in the early research which tends not only to articulate assumptions that ageing per se and thereby, older people in general, are a problem, but goes further by asserting that being old and gay further compounds these problems. Given the context and attitudes in which the research related to older people and in particular older lesbians and gay men has taken place, it is not surprising that the constructed images of both older lesbians and gay men stand immediately alone and divorced from the realities of people's lives. Wahler and Gabbay in their review of the literature comment that the following is characteristic of the image of older gay men contained within the literature:

'...loneliness, isolation, sexlessness, poor psychological adjustment and functioning, fearful anxiousness, sadness and depression and sexual predation on the gay young who reject their company and exclude them from a "youthist" gay culture.'

(1997:9)

In stark contrast to the images of older gay men, older lesbians are frequently portrayed as highly educated, politically liberal, middle class, professionally employed and unmarried or divorced (Jacobs et al. 1999). These gendered images are so very different from each other that one can not help but wonder what lies behind them. Once again, the operation of the dominant discourses of gender and age are made manifest here to ensure that the existence of older lesbians has no consequence for heterosexual men, hence their reported invisibility. This is reflected in Healey's commentary when she asserts that:

'Every lesbian has paid a large price for being different because she is a woman and a lesbian. If she happens also to be a woman of color, or Jewish, or poor or disabled, she then experiences additional reprisals and discrimination. And now, finally having grown to be old (original emphasis), we experience the compounding of all these oppressions in the insidiousness of ageism, and the total effect is most assuredly greater than the sum of the individual parts'.

(1994:111)

Healey also, comments that, having been oppressed all her life, she now is invisible from consideration based upon the reaction to her age and reports being able to walk down the street hand in hand with her female partner and not be frightened because neither of them are seen by others: they are invisible. She also reports that, at the age of 70 years, she has much greater freedom and is less restrained by some of the conventions through which lives are lived.

As we move away from these stark and contrasting stereotypes of older lesbians and gay men, the research begins to focus on two particular and inter-related areas - relationships and the adjustment to the ageing process and ideas of 'successful' ageing. In terms of relationships, the focus in the research is about acceptance of self in terms of sexuality with the assumption that such acceptance means that the person has reconciled themselves to their 'non-standard' form of sexuality. Having achieved self acceptance, the individual older lesbian or gay man is assumed to be more able to establish relationships resulting in a happier and more contented life in comparison to those who have not achieved such reconciliation. The primary indicator of acceptance of sexuality is their

engagement with the gay community⁷ which becomes a test of 'successful' ageing (a test not applied to older heterosexuals).

The implication is that the healthy acceptance of self gives rise to good health in other aspects of life which, in turn, indicates both healthy adjustment to later life and the achievement of 'successful' ageing. It is at this point that these two broad areas become interconnected as the research assumes that being reconciled to one's own sexuality has meant undertaking the process of 'coming out'⁸: of publicly declaring one's sexuality. Coming out is perceived as a personal crisis which, once successfully negotiated, means that the individual can positively, and more successfully, engage with other personal crises such as being an older person and growing older - a further reaffirmation that, in the research, ageing is regarded as a personal crisis. Weinberg (1969, 1970) reported that, although older gay men had, as they had aged, reduced their involvement with their local gay community, they were not any lonelier than younger gay men. Francher and Hankin (1973) reported a reduction in older gay men's involvement in the wider gay community and noted an increase in the contact that they had with both gay and heterosexual social networks. In contrast, Bennett and Thompson's (1980) study of older Australian gay men found that they were not disengaged from the broader community either by choice or by exclusion. However, they did establish that older Australian gay men were more secretive about their sexuality than younger gay men in Australia and that this may be related to cohort effects or of

⁷ In general the phrase lesbian and gay communities refers to those urban hubs which act to attract, through the provision of services and facilities, lesbians and gay men. Such hubs can euphemistically be referred to as 'villages' or 'centres'. In this respect, these references relate to 'communities of place' however, such references can also refer to personal networks and are 'communities of interest'. This reference refers to both types of community.

⁸ In this work the phrase 'coming out' refers to the individually experienced process of '....becoming aware of one's sexual orientation or gender identity and beginning to disclose it to others. A person may be selectively "out" in some situations or to certain people without generally disclosing his or her sexual orientation or gender identity. "Coming out" is a process that takes place over time, in some cases over many years.' (Bochenek and Brown 2001:xiii)

other perceived risks, such as loss of their job. This is, in part, supported by Gray and Dressel (1985) who indicate that older gay men were more likely to wish to maintain secrecy about their sexuality than younger gay men, but that this did not suggest any significant alienation from the broader community.

The research suggests that many older lesbians appeared to view their sexuality in terms of emotional intimacy and personal identification with other women (e.g. Jacobs et al. 1999). Most of the studies pointed to continued interest and valuing of sex although there was an acknowledgement that celibacy was a feature of many older lesbians' lives which, for some, was not a choice. The research also claims that the relationship arrangements involved a belief in monogamy (Minnigerode and Adelman 1978, Raphael and Robinson 1980, Tully 1983, Kehoe 1986). In terms of older gay men, Kimmel's (1977, 1978, 1980) and Kelly's (1977) work acknowledged that, whilst sex remained important, there was a recording of a decrease in the amount of sex that was experienced. Equally, their research demonstrated that older gay men engaged in sex with men of their own age group, which is a contrast to the image presented earlier that suggested that older gay men were preying on younger gay men.

'Successful' ageing and the adjustment to being an older person represents the second preoccupation of the research. Goleman Wolf (1982) suggests that heterosexuals could learn and benefit from a gay model of ageing, with Berger (1984) commenting that both older gay and heterosexual people experience similar issues in terms of their adjustment to ageing - fundamentally the acceptance of self as an older person. Some researchers (Weinberg and Williams 1974, Minnigerode 1976, Kelly 1977, Lee 1987, Pope and Schulz 1990, D'Augelli 1994 and Kooden 1997) argued that older gay men in particular find the experience

of being an older person easier to accept because they have already encountered and survived the life crisis of 'coming out' in an atmosphere of repression and that this has, in fact, assisted them to adjust to ageing. Frencher and Henkin (1973) were the first to propose the idea that 'coming out' as a life crisis assisted older gay men to cope with ageing. Berger (1980) refers to the term 'mastery of crisis', which was later endorsed by Weeks (1983). Berger claims that:

'There are aspects of the homosexual experience that facilitate adjustment to ageing. Social workers who work with the elderly would do well to consider these aspects for what they reveal about adjustment to ageing for homosexuals and heterosexuals alike... the coming-out period is a major life crisis, which, when resolved, provides the individual with a stamina unavailable to many others. Today's older homosexual had to resolve a crisis of independence at a young age and at a time less tolerant of sexual nonconformity. He knew that he could not rely on the traditional family supports that heterosexuals take for granted. Whereas older homosexuals are as likely as heterosexuals to be alone in old age, they are better prepared for it, both emotionally and in terms of support networks of friends'.

(1982:238)

Wahler and Gabbay (1997), in their review of the literature, identify a number of themes related to the adjustment to ageing:

- The similarity between gay and non-gay older people in some of the predictors of successful ageing,
- That self acceptance can be a critical variable,

- That gay men are better prepared for the process of ageing than non-gay men,
- There are some unique challenges to the gay experience of ageing.

In fact, they go on to identify positive benefits of being a lesbian or gay man in later life as they assert:

'the literature suggests that older gay men may adjust to ageing more easily than their non-gay male counterparts. Further, studies indicate that gay men who have grown to a point of acceptance and celebration of themselves experience the highest degree of life satisfaction and positive adjustment to the challenges of ageing, both as gay men and as older individuals.'

(Wahler and Gabbay.1997:13)

Older lesbians are reported to have adapted well to the ageing process and to have a positive self-image (Laner 1979). Patently, older lesbians and gay men do not lead lives separated from family and friends and many of the life cycle changes do have an impact on people's everyday lives. Thus older lesbians and gay men are touched by the death of partners, parents and friends and retirement or the exclusion from work which will have different meanings for different people. Also, we can not assume that all older lesbians' and gay men's lives have been constructed in the same manner with the outcome that individual lives and perceptions of self are identical. Kimmel's (1977, 1978, 1980) work identifies considerable differences between older gay men, thereby recognising their diversity rather than the generalisations upon which the stereotypes are constructed. Many older lesbians and gay men will be mothers and fathers (and

grandmothers and grandfathers) themselves. Whitford, commenting on his own research, states that:

'...a high proportion of all men had children, indicative of the fact that most of these men had been married at some point in their lives'
(1997:92.

The primary condition for gay men in successful ageing is income or access to financial resources. Lee (1987) comments that this is a powerful marker in the general population regardless of sexuality. Education is also a strong indicator and is related to income. This is again related to the whole population of older people and is not specific to older lesbians and gay men. The presence of a life partner is the third factor in the correlation with happiness in old age (Berger 1980; Lee 1987) with loneliness representing one of the major threats to happiness. Ageing itself is the final aspect in the correlation with satisfaction in old age, rather than being gay. This, in part, reflects on attitudes to dependence and the attainment of goals such as a comfortable home and a sex life. These are again related to the whole population and not specifically related to gay male older people.

The message is quite clear: happiness or satisfaction in later life for lesbians and gay men is dependent on other factors rather than sexuality *per se*. However, unlike heterosexual older people, the literature identifies an additional factor for lesbian and gay older people. Whilst this factor is identified differently (Wahler and Gabbay 1997 refer to it as 'self acceptance') it relates to publicly disclosing the nature of their sexuality - of being 'out'.

The reiteration of the dominant discourses of heteronormativity, homophobia and ageism can again be clearly seen in the research as assumptions about what it means to grow older intersect with the meaning of being a lesbian or gay man. In many instances, the assumptions are transparent. However, in others, taken for granted ideas of what being an older lesbian or gay man means restrict the questions which inevitably inform outcomes in terms of understanding the self that is an older lesbian or gay man.

2.4 Constructing and conceptualising the ‘other’ as self

In exploring issues related to the construction of sexuality, this section of the chapter examines how lesbians and gay men were being constructed and constituted as the ‘other’ through implicit assumptions, models of identity formulation and the acknowledgement of the diversity of sexual expression. The ideas or constructs that are identified within this section do inevitably find common expression and become incorporated into everyday discourses which, in turn, inform how the self is perceived. The idea that abstract concepts become incorporated into everyday understandings of self is illustrated in the stories of the older gay men who participated in my research when they describe how, whilst they were engaging in same sex activity earlier in their lives, they were ‘waiting for heterosexuality to arrive’. In this respect we can see references to models of sexual development being incorporated into their everyday understanding of their sexual selves.

An important question which is at the centre of any discussion about sexuality is whether it is a product of our biology over which we have little choice (essentialism, nature) or whether it is constructed to reflect the conditions and

power relationships, which operate within our society (constructionism, nurture). The essentialist/constructionist (nature/nurture) binary, as Fowlkes describes, contrasts those who:

'...identify biological or core determinants of sexual attraction and behaviours and those who emphasize the power of social naming and context to influence sexuality.'

(1994:165)

This binary has influenced the understanding, aetiology and 'treatment' of same sex desire and is expressed in such terms as orientation and preference in respect of sexuality with the consequence that sexual orientation assumes a biological or essentialist determination whilst sexual preference assumes choice and, thereby, a constructionist approach. At the root of this discourse is the desire to understand who we are and why we are different, with the unwritten assumption that heterosexuality is the species norm. As Richardson describes:

'a continuing search for answers to two questions: "Who is a homosexual?" and "What makes a person a homosexual?"... In such assumptions the term homosexual is used to refer to a core and enduring aspect of being a group of individuals.'

(1983:79)

This process of establishing an understanding of, and for, the 'other' began in the 19th century with a move away from an emphasis placed upon sexual acts to a position in which the acts were seen to define the personality or identity of the person undertaking them. At the same time, heterosexuality as a set of acts,

behaviours and relationships was acknowledged as the dominant expression of sexuality – the natural and the normal. These changes were in part a result of the development, and increasing acceptance, of a language that was employed to categorise and describe an individual's identity based upon their behaviour. The term 'homosexual' was, according to Roseneil (2002), first employed by Kertbeny in 1868, though not used in print until 1869, and the term heterosexuality did not emerge until 1880. These terms and the subsequent descriptions of behaviour and attitude developed out of the emerging disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis.

With the increasing emphasis on family and heterosexual relationships, which Roseneil (2002) dates from the 1910s onwards, the nature of heterosexual marriage changed. Thus marriage moved from a position in which the individuals could and would, in many respects, conduct themselves in separate single sex spheres to one where sexual identity and cathexis were to be achieved within the marital relationship. This change in focus was primarily directed towards women, who were to be persuaded '*...of the importance of fulfilling their emotional and sexual desires through their marital relationship*' (Roseneil 2002:31). What emerged was the dominance of heterosexuality and, in particular, of male heterosexuals, currently expressed as hegemonic heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. Heterosexuality became the norm, the natural expression of sexuality, which was, and still is, reinforced by the church, protected by the law, confirmed by scientists and doctors and written about by commentators and novelists. Such is the dominance of heterosexuality that everyone is measured against it. Thus individuals who do not conform to this norm were, and still are, regarded as deviant and unnatural.

Sedgwick employing the metaphor of a map maintained that this dominance had the result that:

'...every person, just as he or she was necessarily assignable to a male or female gender, was now considered necessarily assignable as well to a homo- or hetero- sexuality, a binarized identity that was full of implications, however, confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence.'

(1991:2)

The recognition of heterosexuality and its subsequent dominance, which is now referred to as heteronormativity, clearly established the normal state for the species based in part on a perceived natural and moral imperative – reproduction. Foucault identifies this process in the following terms:

'The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanor avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one's speech. And sterile behavior carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty.'

(1987:3-4)

Having established the norm - heterosexuality — other expressions of sexuality became set in opposition to that norm, creating the hetero/homosexual binary and its related opposition 'inside/outside' (Fuss 1991). This binary or oppositional stance has had a number of consequences, not least ensuring that individuals became viewed as being either one or the other — either heterosexual or homosexual. Thus sexuality has been viewed in a somewhat simplistic manner — that of a duality — which was fixed with no potential of movement or change for heterosexuals or other sexual identities.

Cass (1984a) argues that, from the early 1970s, an increasing amount of literature emerged which reflected and postulated different ideas on what she refers to as the 'homosexual identity'. This interest in lesbian and gay identity has, according to Cass a number sources namely:

- '(1) the change in perspective, apparent since the 19th Century, from homosexual-as-object to homosexual-as-person;*
- (2) the gradual abandonment, during the 1960s of the notion of collectivity and its replacement with the ideology of the individual, which emphasized the rights of individuals, free expression, self-fulfilment and social tolerance;*
- (3) the increasing emphasis in social psychology and sociology on the humanistic approach to the individual. In sum, the climate of the 1970s was ripe for the homosexual to be defined into "personhood" against a backdrop of an oppressed minority group.'*

(1984a:105-6)

Cass (1984a) goes on to show that the concept of homosexual identity lacked clear definition but, in a later article, establishes a theoretical model of lesbian and gay identity formulation (Cass 1984b). This model identifies a number of stages through which lesbians and gay men progress in order to establish their identity. It should be noted that the model is in addition to other models of identity formation and is not age specific. The model also purports to identify the process, from which a lesbian and gay identity may emerge. The model is a six stage process, involving:

Stage 1	identity confusion.
Stage 2	identity comparison.
Stage 3	identity tolerance.
Stage 4	identity acceptance.
Stage 5	identity pride.
Stage 6	identity synthesis.

In essence, the model describes the process of the individual recognising a difference in sexual interest from their previously held identity (the assumption is that heterosexuality is the species norm) and then making contact with other like-minded people through which they can address their emotional and sexual needs; the development of a positive view of themselves from this contact resulting in a pride in themselves and a loyalty to other lesbians and gay men as a group. The final stage results from positive contacts with heterosexuals which aids the development of themselves as people with *'many sides to their character, only one part of which is related to homosexuality'* (Cass, 1984b:152).

Fernbach (1981) seeks to outline the 'causes' for the deviation that is 'homosexuality' by maintaining that gay male sexuality arises from an effeminate gender identity. This, in turn, is a consequence of the individual not being separated from the maternal culture by either the father, or in broader terms, wider heterosexual society. Living in a heterosexual society and being effeminate ensures that the individual views himself narcissistically and as the object of male desire. Gough (1989) argues that the inevitable conclusion from Fernbach's theory is that all gay men are effeminate.

Chapman and Brannock (1987) demonstrate that there are, in fact, a number of models of lesbian and gay identity formulation, to which they make an additional contribution. Many of these models involve a linear progression from being heterosexual to being a lesbian or gay; all of which involve stages that need to be completed. Also many of the models view this process as a journey of self-discovery, of moving from state of unhappiness to a newfound state of completeness and happiness. Esterberg comments that:

'most previous models of homosexual identity have seen identity development as occurring in one direction only: from straight to lesbian or gay'.

(2002:221-222)

Gibbins in reflecting on the postmodern theoretical understanding of the fluidity of identity, maintains that:

'...postmodernists reject metanarratives and replace them with multiple narrative disciplines, and reject methodological foundationalism and

essentialism, so they also reject ideas of an essential human nature or self; structured lifestyles based upon social categorisation; and the ideas that values are merely epiphenomena of these primary structures.'

(1998:41)

Gibbins maintains that our understanding of identity has moved away from being fixed and universal – which in the context of this discussion would mean either heterosexual or homosexual – to an understanding of multiple personality with many facets which are often conflicting. These facets find expression in individual narratives and are not restricted or held together by structural and functional necessity. Gibbins illustrates this diversity of self with the following example:

'...a married mother shares her life with work friends and another at the health and sports club, and may gender bend while exploring on the internet. A redundant male miner from South Wales may have a life with young mothers maintaining a 'drinking-and-rugby' culture with old friends.'

(1998:41)

Of equal importance in this discussion of the fluidity of identity and the rejection of fixed identities, is the understanding that being a lesbian or gay man does not mean a single expression of this identity. Thus diversity of sexuality intersects with other expressions of diversity within society, such as ethnic background and disability, which creates, as Roseneil comments:

'[a] queer community' of lipstick lesbians, butches, femmes, FTMs s/mers, switchhitters, muscle marys, opera queens, bisexuals,

transsexuals, the transgendered, those who identify as black, Asian, Irish, Jewish, latino...'

(2002:29)

However, age, as an expression of diversity, is rarely recognised, but age and being older add an additional element to our understanding of the lives of older lesbians and gay men. Such exclusion, may in part, reflect the dominance of ageism both within the lesbian and gay community and in broader society with its assumption that all older people do not have sex and are asexual. Public lesbian and gay spaces tend not to be occupied by older lesbians and gay men which may be a direct consequence of ageism as much as it may reflect the commercial decision to target groups who are perceived to have large disposable incomes, notably young gay men. As a consequence, the recognition of a fluidity of identity does not solely describe people moving across the hetero/homosexual binary (for example, men who have sex with men) but such fluidity exists within and between people who would style themselves as lesbian and gay. The term 'queer', in this instance, can be viewed as being inclusive in that it refers to everybody who is not heterosexual.

The temptation, however, is to view such diversity as a post-modern phenomenon which has resulted from the challenge to heteronormativity and hegemonic marital heterosexuality. The reality is different in that many of the current expressions of diversity that we now recognise and accept have been in existence for many decades. This is illustrated by Taylor et al. (2002) who confirm the existence of lesbian and gay communities in the major urban areas of the United States. Gay men were also visible within black areas of New York, notably Harlem where 'sissies', 'faggots' and 'bulldaggers' were present in parties, clubs and

speakeasies. Garber (1989) comments that the gay men themselves employed such terms and labelling as a system of classification which stood outside more academic schemas. Outside of the entertainment industry, lesbians were significantly constrained by their lack of financial independence and their restricted access to both work and leisure opportunities. However, lesbian communities did emerge through the 1920s, primarily amongst working class women, whilst Faderman (1991) notes that separate white and African American communities existed in Chicago in the 1920s and, furthermore, Bullough (1977) noted that a lesbian community existed in Salt Lake City, Utah. In the United Kingdom in the earlier part of the 20th century, the terms 'nancy' and 'rent' were employed respectively to describe effeminate gay men and heterosexual men who had sex with men. What is evident from the work of Garber (1989), Faderman (1991) and Bullough (1977) is that lesbians and gay men constructed their identities in various forms which, in some instances, stood outside of the conventional construction of gendered identity, reflecting the processes of self-making and negotiating the tensions involved in constructing the sexualised self. However, we can not assume that all older lesbians and gay men were in positions to adopt such identities.

Lee (1989) identified two solutions for gay men through this period: the first was to marry and possibly conduct same sex relationships in secret or they could remain single with an air of asexuality which was less of a threat to the heterosexuals with whom they lived. Kochman (1997) describes how many lesbians and gay men were both individually, and by association, labelled as '*sick by doctors, immoral by clergy, unfit by the military and a menace by the police*' (Kochman 1997:2). Many will have, as Lee (1989) demonstrated, hidden their sexuality and conformed to expectation only to potentially change their lifestyle and sexual identity much later in life, reflecting changing attitudes and individual circumstances. Bell and

Weinberg (1978) in their research claimed that 20% of their gay white male sample had been married with a lower percentage for gay black men. They also suggested that 33% of white lesbians had been married with 50% of black lesbians also being married. Interestingly, they also claimed that 20% of gay men had children whilst 40% of lesbians had children within the context of a heterosexual relationship. The outcomes of Bell and Weinberg's (1978) work can be interpreted in many ways thus reflecting Lee's (1989) assertion of a hidden or repressed identity masked by a veneer of heterosexuality. Equally, the dominance of heteronormativity may have had the result that, for many, knowledge of alternative expressions of desire was not available and therefore not part of the repertoire upon which choice could be based. Finally, again reflecting the dominance of heteronormativity, individuals may have made choices related to their sexuality based upon social attitude and the sanctions that would have been faced at that time when pursuing lesbian or gay identities. In essence, social attitudes have changed sufficiently to allow others to self identify in later life and to emerge as lesbians and gay men.

The difficulty in such an analysis is the assumptions that are made which become generalised statements. Thus it is likely that some older lesbians and gay men did undertake heterosexual marriage to hide their same sex desire. Whilst for others, it is only in later life that they have discovered their own attraction to people of the same sex at a time of much greater liberalisation in attitudes towards same sex relationships. Unlike the dominant ageist assertion, the process of growing older does not necessarily 'fix' sexuality and the sense of a sexualised self. Having regard to the idea of the fluidity of sexuality, such expressions in later life may help to acknowledge that sexuality is not the domain of the young and that older people can equally express themselves within the fluidity of sexuality.

Associated with the conceptual understandings of sexuality is the more recent idea of self-making that Heaphy suggests lesbians and gay men actively engage with. Heaphy states that:

'Self making...is key to lesbian and gay experience and is intrinsically bound up with the creation of distinctive personal and support relationships.'

(2009:121)

The idea of self-making reflects the work of Blasius (1994) who argues that lesbians and gay men have grown up and lived within the context of heteronormative social structures and normative patterns of living and, as a consequence, have had to construct and develop a sense of self which has been outside of these structures. In this respect, lesbians and gay men have had to define self in the absence of role models, protect self by managing the perception that others made of them, and develop heightened levels of self awareness. The issue of self-making is also reflected in the work of Giddens (1991, 1992) and Weeks (1991, 1995, 2005) and others and is focused on the nature of the relationships that lesbians and gay men establish and maintain arguing that these are *'...exemplars of negotiated...relationships characteristic of late modernity'* (Heaphy 2009:121). The negotiated character of these relationships is purported to be egalitarian in nature based upon reciprocity and mutuality. Furthermore, the character of such relationships is regarded as having an actual or potential transformational component. Heaphy (2009) does acknowledge that the assumptive basis of this construct has been the subject of criticism (Jamieson 1998 and Adkins 2002) and that such critiques are based upon the resilience of

gender inequalities and an over optimistic view of the power of agency. Equally, the assumed egalitarian nature of such relationships ignores the growing literature related to same sex domestic violence (see Barnes 2008: Merrill and Wolfe 2000 and Ristock 2002)

I would argue that the construct of self-making has a substantive basis but that this is located in both celebration and defence of difference rather than the claim for a transformational component which does not sufficiently acknowledge the basis upon which the need or requirement for self-making emerged. The making of self, particularly within the context of oppressive social structures, needs to produce an outcome that does not readily construct a disjuncture within the setting in which the self is situated. The result is that the making of self requires a mix or a blend of relevant components which are drawn from the social structures in which the person is located and, as Green observes, is '*constituted in language and interaction*' (2007:26).

The older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research have constructed and negotiated their sense of self within social environments and structures that were very hostile to them. As an example, the criminal definition of male same sex sexual activity prior to 1967 had the result that, for the majority of gay men, the over arching need was to be able, as much as possible, to 'blend in' and not stand out, thereby presenting a comfortable and safe synergy with heteronormative society but which still enabled them to express their difference as gay men. The making of self is therefore related to how individual lesbians and gay men managed the disjuncture between social construct and personal conduct and behaviour. This approach acknowledges the need in hostile social environments to manage the presentation of self (see Goffman 1982); however, inevitably this also

involves conforming to a number of stereotypical constructs. In Chapter 7, we will see that, whilst gay men in general are placed at the bottom of a hierarchy of masculinities, they receive and enjoy much of the privileges afforded to the embodied gendered male. As Ahmed states '*Normativity is comfortable for those who can inhabit it...*' (2004:147).

In a further example of the process of self-making drawing upon the elements in which the self is situated, the narratives of the older gay men contain both implicit and explicit references to the exercise of moral standards in their conduct with others. The exercise of such a moral standard is set within the context of men having sex with other men which, in the earlier part of their lives, was regarded as a criminal activity. The issue therefore is how the individual achieves a degree of coherence of self in resolving the dichotomy between expressed moral standards of behaviour whilst engaging in activities that have been clearly identified as illegal. The resolution of this issue rests within the individual's negotiated meaning and personal experience of these sexual acts which involve a complex interaction between the giving and receiving of pleasure, the belief that they were not causing harm, honesty and Judeo/Christian values. Given that this dichotomy was individually negotiated and resolved within the process of self-making, there are inevitable inconsistencies within their constructed moral selves. The most obvious example of such inconsistencies would be the expressed belief that they were honest in their construction of their sexual selves whilst two of the older men never told their respective parents that they were gay men.

The making of the moral self enabled each individual to negotiate a coherence of self, within the context of a heteronormative society that determined that their

sexual self was immoral and, also for the men, illegal. Unequivocally, each of the older lesbians and gay men constructed a sense of their moral self which allowed them to continue with their same sex activities whilst successfully engaging in relationships with heterosexuals whose own attitudes to these activities would have been informed by negative social constructs and would more than likely have been hostile to them. The idea of self-making therefore brings together many influences which have helped to construct and situate each of the agentic older lesbians and gay men and from which they have been able to make sense of themselves.

2.5 Identity and ageing

Sexual identity maintains a duality of approach and so, too, does an ageing identity, which draws upon a distinction between physiology and social construction. Within the former there are a number of models which describe the physiological process of ageing and its effect on the body. Each of these maintains a decay analogy. However, the fundamental distinction between them is the location of the start of the decay. Some models begin the process of decay related ageing from birth whilst others employ reproduction as the catalyst for decay. Thus individuals who are past their peak in terms of sexual reproduction are increasingly not needed by the species and therefore begin to decline towards death.

In constructionist terms, ageing identities arise from the social significance afforded to the ageing individual, with the catalyst being the exclusion from work as a consequence of state retirement policies. The entry into later life is therefore determined by this socially constructed policy that is currently being reviewed to achieve a retirement age of 70 years which, in turn, reflects the dictates of the

economy and further reinforces the social construction of ageing. As a result, the approach maintains that there is nothing inherent in the ageing individual that determines or requires retirement at a specific age but that retirement substantially changes the relationships and interaction between the older person and older people as a group and the rest of society, and that such relationships come to be based upon dependence.

The bio-medical approach or model has been the dominant meta-narrative in which '...the medical model has dominated the perceptions of old age' (Wahidin and Powell 2003). This model, which has presented ageing within the imagery of decline and decay, has been the basis upon which divisions are constructed between the 'young' old and the 'old' old. The inevitability of ageing and its consequences set within the bio-medical model establishes ideas of 'good' and 'bad' ageing where the latter is based upon individual culpability and carelessness. The technology associated with bio-medicine has created the potential to reconstruct the body thus to hide the ageing process. Biggs and Powell comment that the:

'...emerging master narratives of biological decline on the one hand, and consumer agelessness on the other, co-exist, talking to different populations and promoting contradictory, yet interrelated narratives by which to age. They are contradictory in their relation to notions of autonomy, independence and dependency on others, yet {they are} linked through the importance of techniques for maintenance, either medicalized bodily control or through the adoption of "golden-age" lifestyles.'

(2001:97)

The meta-narratives of functionalism, political economy and feminism which have been the broad perspectives from which the conceptual understanding of late life have been drawn, all have at their core the 'problematism' of old age (Chapter 9 critically reviews these constructs). Given the prevalence of ageism and the dominance and impact of ageist meta-narratives, ageing identities assume the potential of considerable negativity related to their own ageing. However, we do need to consider the difference in information received by individuals and how that is internalised to construct individual narratives and an understanding of that person's position in the world.

In considering our own ageing, do we know what we are expected to feel at key ages, or do we in fact view ourselves as being younger despite these years? Do we even know what and how we are supposed to feel at these ages? If we cannot provide answers to these questions, we can not assume that people in their 70s, 80s and 90s feel any different. Although the meta-narratives of ageing are negative in their assumptions, it is likely that individuals construct their own narratives to reflect their particular circumstances. The implications for older lesbians and gay men, given the discourses related to age and sexuality outlined above, is that they will construct their own narrative to reflect their life course and their current situation. This may involve non-disclosure of their sexual identity as much as it may involve references to terms that are currently not in use. The importance is that person's starting point – how they refer to themselves.

The pervasiveness of ageism ensures that negative attributes are associated with the ageing body well before old age is encountered. In referring to the culture of

the projected image of masculinity within some aspects of gay male centres, McNaught describes his feelings about a trip to a gym at the age of 36:

'... As I slip into my gym clothes now, it makes me sad and angry to think of how many times and how many ways I have kept my body covered because I didn't think it measured up to what I should look like – my arms were too skinny, my muscles too small, my chest too flat.'

He goes on to comment about this experience,

'perhaps the saddest and angriest I have ever felt about this constant struggle was when I realised that gay men can intimidate me as badly as straight men do.'

(1986:65-66)

For older lesbians and gay men, the interaction of the discourses related to sexuality and ageing has the result that who they are (lesbian or gay) and what they are (ageing), are both on the whole negatively portrayed. Older people in general experience a denial of their sexuality as a consequence of the influence of ageism which assumes that all older people are asexual. Even when sexuality is recognised, it is invariably pathologised with an assumption of heterosexuality. As lesbians and gay men, their bodies are no longer regarded as attractive and wanted in a culture which espouses youth. As ageing individuals they are subjected to metaphors of decline and decay and are expected to take responsibility for this or act as passive recipients of younger people's efforts to keep them alive.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the evidence which supports the social and cultural existence of lesbians and gay men in both major urban areas and in other locations. In this respect, it is evident that lesbians and gay men had a presence through the twentieth century and that this presence meant that they made contact with each other, established relationships and maintained personal networks.

Equally, despite the official rubric of the time which delivered severe reactions to lesbians and gay men and the current received wisdom which suggests that lesbian and gay cultures are a recent phenomenon, throughout this period there was quite widespread knowledge of the existence of lesbians and gay men and even knowledge of the places at which lesbians and gay men would meet. I am not saying that all lesbians and gay men were in a position where they could take advantage of these arrangements or that all lesbians and gay men experienced the same events in the same manner; clearly some lived geographically isolated existences, whilst others remained hidden and possibly conformed to social expectations and married. However, what is important is that the lives and the stories of the older lesbians and gay men that participated in my research have a context.

Individual stories invariably reflect the circumstances of that person and the manner in which they have engaged in self-making. Inevitably the contexts in which they as individuals were, and are, situated are extremely diverse with the consequence that a work of this nature can only illustrate the spectrum of this diversity. Clearly, I have not touched upon other contexts which add complexity to this diversity such as the effects of war, class, race, the impact of books, the

theatre. or radio broadcasts such as the BBC's *'Round the Horne'* which was broadcast between 1965 and 1968.

Research in the 1970s and 80s indicated that there were similarities and differences between older lesbians and gay men and the broader older population. This research was in many ways influenced by the dominant discourses of heteronormativity, homophobia and ageism and produced outcomes which reflect the assumptions of these discourses. In a similar manner, the research into lesbian and gay identity formulation and the subsequent models that were developed also reflect these dominant assumptions and have become part of the everyday lived experiences of lesbians and gay men, not least articulated in response to the question: 'What made you gay?'

All of this material affords us some insight into the broader context in which the six older lesbians and gay men lived the early part of their lives. The three older gay men established a sense of their sexual selves initially through play with a clear understanding that adults were not to find out the nature of that play. Continuing to hide their sexuality as they grew older, they sought contact with other men although two of them state that they were *'awaiting the arrival of heterosexuality'*, as if they were stuck in a phase of sexual development thus reflecting a popular understanding of psychoanalysis. The three older lesbians married and had children and in doing so conformed to the expectations laid upon them by heteronormativity and patriarchy. However, being married did not bring them the pleasure that they expected which for two of them was realised in their first kiss with a woman. All of them have had to construct a sense of who they are and learn to manage both their own presentation and how they were perceived by other people in a social culture that was very hostile towards them for most of their lives.

The older lesbians and gay men told me about the stories of their lives and, in particular, the stories that they felt they could share with me. These stories are fundamentally private and should be treated with dignity and respect. Equally, it was also very important to me that, in interacting with the older lesbians and gay men my research practice was ethically situated, again ensuring that they as individuals were respected and treated with dignity. The following chapter sets out the context in which I undertook my research which is articulated through Kenyon's (1996) ethical framework for ageing and biography.

Chapter 3 - The context of my research practice and process.

3.1 Introduction

My research process aimed to garner narratives or stories of the lives of older lesbians and gay men with a focus on an aspect of their life that is generally regarded as inherently private - their sexuality. To achieve this, I needed to establish an approach that would allow me to access people's accounts of their life in a way that treated them as constructors of their narratives whilst ensuring that they and their stories were granted the dignity and respect that one person should afford another. Equally, given that the organisation of these stories was around issues of sexuality and sexualities which over time have been constructed as deviant, abnormal and even criminal, the ethical basis of my research was of particular importance to me.

This chapter will outline both my research *practice* and *process* elucidating these aspects through the employment of Kenyon's (1996) ethical framework. The framework is specifically related to research that is associated with ageing and biography and is extremely apposite for my own research for two interconnected reasons, namely:

1. The approach adopted by Kenyon (1996) within his framework validates the creation of new knowledge through the telling of stories that have been obtained within the context of clear ethical standards; and

2. In generating new knowledge, the framework establishes a value base for both the research and the researcher thereby ensuring that the individual who is participating in the research is respected as a person with feelings, emotions and rights.

In respect of the former, the premise of my research is the search to understand the meanings attached by older lesbians and gay men to their social reality and social action in respect of their sexual self throughout their life course. As they have become older people, their social reality and the meaning given to that reality will invariably be influenced by broader social processes and structures, not least the reaction of others to them as older people. In this respect, my research is set within an interpretive paradigm where the knowledge that I am seeking to generate rests within individual interpretations of people's social worlds, past and present. Given that the knowledge generated by this research is drawn from information provided by individuals who are telling stories about their lives, it is extremely important that they are responded to within clear ethical frameworks and standards. This involves ethical treatment of the information collected, the manner in which it is elicited, and the significance and meaning that is given to that information. This is not to say that research adopting other paradigmatic principles should be less, or even not, concerned with ethical considerations. However, I am arguing that, in dealing with people and their lives, the ethical treatment of them by researchers has to be a fundamental and core element of the research process.

In general terms, researchers from an oral history approach (see Burgess 1982; Ritchie 1995; Dunaway and Baum 1996) would suggest the stories that are being told about the person's life should be confirmed through third party sources. As part of a process, this move towards triangulation or confirming the events that are

part of the stories being told has its methodological roots within the paradigm that is positivism and its concern with the validity and reliability of 'real' information. Given the nature of the knowledge that I am seeking to generate, there are a number of difficulties associated with this approach as my research was focused on the development of the sexuality of my research participants notably when they were much younger and in a very different social climate than currently exists. Equally, the information that I was seeking referred to their interpretation of events that were related to issues that are, in themselves, essentially private in nature. Indeed, it becomes unwarranted and unnecessary because the stories are individual interpretations of meaning.

Secondly - the value base of the research and the researcher - is interlinked and rests on a number of issues primarily related to the type of information generated and the approach of the researcher. In terms of my own value base, behaviour which has an ethical underpinning is extremely important to me both in terms of my research practice and also in the broader conduct of my life as this reflects my personality, my professional background and the context in which my current employment is located. My interpretation of ethically sound practice rests with the dual issues of respect and dignity which inform both my behaviour and how I would aspire to treat others. Whilst respect and dignity may be regarded as ideal states, the importance of an ethical framework such as Kenyon's (1996) is that it establishes a normative basis that enables us to evaluate our practice and behaviour and aspire to better performance.

Kenyon's (1996) framework is the pivot for this chapter and will be employed in two ways which hinge on a distinction between research *practice* and *process*. In general terms in referring to research *practice*, I am focusing on the activities that

are involved in being with research participants which, for me, involves issues of honesty, clarity, consent and, of course, the practical issues of 'What do I do in this situation...?' In terms of *process*, the distinction I am drawing upon involves the additional activities that are a step removed from direct contact with research participants such as sampling, recruitment and the analysis of the narratives.

Given this distinction, the chapter will initially explore my research *practice* through the critical application of the components of the framework with a key emphasis on ensuring that my research *practice* maintained an ethically sound basis. I will then outline my research process with reference to the framework, exploring how this was employed in order to establish that the *process* of my research equally achieved ethical standards. The application of Kenyon's framework to the different constituent elements of my research ensures that ethical considerations were at the forefront of the entirety of my research.

3.2 The application of Kenyon's framework to my research *practice*.

Kenyon (1996) has outlined a framework of ethics which he relates specifically to ageing and biography in which he maintains that 'biographical ageing' is '*...an existential, ontological phenomenon, one which is tied to the basic propensity of a human being to create and discover meaning*' (Kenyon 1996:660). In this respect he is referring to the nature of biography and its relationship to meaning and, in particular to the meaning of events that have occurred in the past. The recalling of past events and the meaning that is attributed to them is fundamentally rooted in the present. Whilst the events or circumstances can be outlined sequentially, the meaning that the individual places upon those events is interpreted through life's experience and within the context of the moment of the recall. As a result, the researcher is dealing with a dynamic process in which the past and the present

and, to some extent, the future interact to provide meaning. Kenyon's (1996) reflection on the nature of what he refers to as the 'biographical encounter' had important implications for both the process of my research and my own reflexive examination of the information generated which will be explored later in this chapter.

Kenyon's framework includes four broad 'areas of concern', namely:

1. Informed consent,
2. Autonomy and competence,
3. The ground rules of the research,
 - i specificity of the approach employed,
 - ii reflection on the conceptions, attitudes and meaning of ageing,
 - iii universality,
4. Authenticity and coherence.

Underlying this framework is what Kenyon refers to as 'practical ethics' which he regards as:

'...a form of reasoning, a reflective process that attempts to answer the basic question that can be put in the following way "what should I do in this situation, all things considered?"'

(1996:660)

For Kenyon, practical ethics lies in the 'domain of action' in which decision making and moral reasoning inform the response to the dynamic issues that can arise whilst undertaking research and which may require an immediate response on the

part of the researcher. The response to such dynamic events, he urges, should reflect the person concerned and not the narrow self-interest of the researcher and the research. This seeks the development of a coherent response to immediate issues that arise during the interviews that can generate material which is both unexpected and difficult given current social mores. Kenyon maintains that responses in such situations should reflect the interests of the respondent and not the research and be morally reasoned with clear decision making.

The following example of my own research practice affords both an illustration of Kenyon's practical ethics and my own adherence to ethical behaviour. During my first interview with Robert, he made it very clear that he regarded himself as a nudist and this definition of self was set within the context for him of opportunities for sexual contact with other men. My second interview with him occurred on a very hot summer's day and as I was parking my car he came out of his home to greet me in what appeared to be nothing other than a very large tee shirt. As I waved to him from the car I was rapidly working out what I was going to do and how should I behave if he did, in fact, have nothing covering his genitalia or once inside his home he presented himself for the interview naked given that he had previously expressed that he viewed nudism and being naked, within the context of sex. As I took my sunglasses off and began to exit my car I resolved that how he presented himself within his own home was his choice and that I would have to respect his decision making. However, in adopting an ethical position, there were implications for me which I would explain to him and ask him to put clothes on whilst I was with him. If he decided to remain in a naked or semi naked state which left his genitalia exposed, I could not undertake the interview given that he associates being naked with sexual activity and as a consequence I would have to leave. Having reached a point in which I could both respect his decision making

and choices whilst maintaining a clear ethical position, he turned to re-enter his home and I could clearly see that the back of his tee shirt was in fact tucked into the waistband of a pair of shorts - dilemma resolved.

The first element of Kenyon's (1996) framework is that of **informed consent** within which he identifies a number of key themes, namely:

- Trust,
- Rights to privacy and confidentiality,
- Negotiated consent,
- Decisional capacity,
- Consent being truly voluntary.

Implicit within the issue of consent is the development of trust between the respondents and myself. Trust, Kenyon argues, involves a reciprocal exchange within the research relationship that focuses on the ability of the researcher to gather data initially at the outset of the relationship. As trust develops this, in turn, affects the quality or nature of the information that may be obtained as the respondent relaxes and feels more willing to share information. Kenyon goes on to assert that, as the trust relationship becomes firmer, more intimate information is released by the respondent. The inference is that the quality of information improves as trust develops, which begs the question whether information obtained at the early stages of the research process should be re-established under the auspices of the trust that has developed over time. However, the idea that the development of trust is a linear process that moves from limited to complete trust based upon experience and the passage of time does not reflect the complexities associated with the interaction which is the biographical interview. Therefore, as

much as trust can be won, it can equally be lost or diminished. Trust may also vary to reflect the issue that is being explored in the research process. This point is further explored in the discussion of negotiated consent.

In exchange for the sharing of self, the researcher has a moral obligation to ensure that the research does not harm the person by maintaining rights to privacy and confidentiality. Kayser-Jones and Koenig assert that:

'the right to privacy implies that individuals have control over when and how communication about themselves is given to others, and confidentiality suggests that an agreement has been made that limits access to private information.'

(1994:21, cited in Kenyon 1996:662)

The premise of my research practice and the details of my ethical approval (which is discussed below) required that transcripts of the interviews were returned to the individual respondent in order for them to ensure that they were happy about the content. I was able to transcribe each interview and take the transcript with me to the next interview. In respect of the final interview, I posted the transcription with a recording of delivery. With each transcript I asked the person to read it and to advise me if there was any part of the content that they wished to change or delete (which I was not asked to do). The return of material to the respondents in part addresses concerns about the control of information as it affords the opportunity to re-visit the narratives that were being provided to me.

However, the issue then arises about ownership of the material: to whom does it belong, because from this flows how the information is employed and the circumstances in which it is used. Quite simply, does the material belong to:

- the respective respondent as it is their life which is being narrated;
- to myself as the researcher who gathered the material and analysed it;
- to the Open University for which it is being employed in the pursuit of a doctoral award; or
- the University of Salford as my employer and sponsor?

The issue of ownership was not particularly problematic because, in consenting to be interviewed, each person was told in writing why I wanted to interview them and how I might make use of the material. In this respect, clarity of understanding was achieved by all parties at the outset and this remained part of an ongoing dialogue with an understanding that the material would not be used out of context.

However, if, as Fischer maintains, '*social research holds out the promise of anonymity for respondents, but detailed individual stories may violate this promise.*' (1994:4, cited in Kenyon 1996:661) there is an innate tension between the presentation of narratives to a wider audience and the imperative to maintain individual anonymity. The immediate temptation on the part of the researcher is to change particular details of the individual and their narrative. This 'ability' to change the nature of the data in order to maintain an alternative moral imperative goes to the heart of the criticism by positivists of qualitative research. Given the tests of the credibility of data maintained within positivism, notably validity, reliability and replicability, such changes to the data would undermine the entire research process from the perspective of quantitative researchers.

The changes that I have made to the narratives have been minimal, with the primary change being the names that I am using within this text which are not the real names of the people concerned. Rather than change information in order to maintain privacy and confidentiality, I have chosen to omit particular details that could possibly be used to aid someone in identifying the people that I had interviewed. In practical terms, maintaining privacy and confidentiality also involved such issues as ensuring the security of the material that I was holding in respect of the people who were participating in the research. As a result the tapes, transcripts and the outcome of the analysis of individual interviews were kept, when not in use, in a fireproof safe at my home address to which only I had access. In the event of anything happening to me, which meant that I was no longer able to maintain this level of security, a friend was asked to completely destroy all the material.

Obtaining informed consent is a fundamental requirement of most research processes and one that is all too frequently viewed as a one-off event that involves the respondent signing a written consent form at the beginning of the data gathering process. Viewing informed consent in this manner is somewhat naïve and ignores both the complexity and the interactivity that is inevitably involved in undertaking biographical interviews which are fundamentally premised on a relationship between the researcher and the respondent. As such, the issue of negotiated consent is raised by Kenyon within his framework in that it more accurately reflects the process that is undertaken recognising that consent is an ongoing process which is conducted throughout the research. Kayser-Jones and Koenig maintain that:

'In qualitative research, for example, the consent process is sometimes a prolonged negotiation between the researcher and informants rather than a formalized moment at one point in time when a consent document is signed by the informant.'

(1994:18, cited in Kenyon 1996:661)

In this respect, Kayser-Jones and Koenig are referring to issues that are at the very heart of the *'biographical encounter'* and which are related to remembering the past which is a process that is filtered through the conditions of the present which include the dynamic of the interview and the relationship between themselves and the interviewer. As a result, the interview becomes a dynamic process as the respondent filters and edits the stories of their past and, in the process, decides whether to tell, what to tell and what aspects to tell of their life. This very dynamic process is reflective of consent being granted on an on-going basis based on the decision to tell their story. During my final interview with Janice, it was made very clear to me that there were aspects of her life that she was not willing to talk about to a man. Respecting her decision does not indicate that her narrative was invalidated by the absence of these issues but rather she, like all my research participants, was actively engaged in managing the information that she was presenting to me. Equally, this also meant that the issue of informed consent was very much alive for her over the many hours that we spent discussing events in her life. This issue of the presentation of self will be discussed later in this chapter.

The next aspect of informed consent identified by Kenyon (1996) relates to the individual's capacity to give consent. In an inherently ageist society, the stereotypes of older people suggest both the need for their protection, based upon

perceived vulnerability as a direct consequence of their age, and that all older people are forgetful and live in the past. The consequence of these powerful images is that older people are perceived to be unable to give consent because they lack the capacity to do so. This does not reflect the reality of the vast majority of older people's lives. Chronological age *per se* does not inherently equate to incapacity.

Underlying these powerful negative images of older people is the issue of dementia which is a specific process that can impede an individual's capacity to give informed consent. However, illnesses that give rise to a dementing process are not age-related even though the incidence increases with age. Chapman and Marshall comment that '*one in ten of us will get dementia and we will get it in old age. The older we are the more likely we are to get it.*' (1996:4) Dementia is a progressive illness, the presence of which does not automatically infer incapacity. However, as the specific disease that gives rise to the dementia progresses, its impact on memory becomes more profound and the issue of capacity does become more acute (see Hepworth 2000, Jamieson and Victor 2002 and Roberts 2002).

The presence of a dementing illness with an individual has two broad consequences for my research, the first being the capacity to give consent to participate with the research. The second relates to the focus of the research which places an emphasis on the recall of feelings and interpretations of events that occurred some 50 or 60 years earlier. Given that intact memory is such a crucial issue for my research, the presence of a process that interferes with memory and which can undermine recall would act to potentially inhibit the recalling of events from the past. In terms of my research, I chose not to interview

any person who appeared to have issues of forgetfulness. Clearly where short term memory is impeded, the ability of the person to remember that they have and what they have given consent to becomes unreliable. In this respect, I employed the first interview which was biographical in nature in order to establish whether the person was experiencing memory issues which would therefore potentially make questionable the consent to participate that had already been elicited from them.

The final aspect of informed consent which is identified by Kenyon (1996) relates to ensuring that the consent which is given is, in fact, given truly voluntarily.

Kenyon cites a number of examples in which older people have been either coerced into taking a particular course of action or that their wishes and intentions are in some manner re-fashioned to meet the objectives of, more often than not, younger people. His concern is therefore that ageing and biographical research truly reflect the interests of the older person rather than those of the researcher.

The approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Salford for my research was obtained in 2004. The approval was set within the context of a process which has been strictly adhered to through my research and which is outlined in Appendix A. The emphasis within the process was on ensuring that the consent obtained was both informed and freely given and at no time was pressure exerted on individual older lesbians and gay men to participate in the research, thereby maintaining Kenyon's insistence on truly voluntary informed consent.

Autonomy and competence represent the second aspect of Kenyon's (1996) ethical framework and are located in the understanding that everybody has a story to tell, and in being biographically active, we are still creating our own story. The reference to autonomy relates to the individuality of people and asserts that, as a

result of age, their ability to tell and to continue to develop their story is not impaired. Kenyon goes on to comment that, traditionally, older people are stereotypically viewed as being in one of a number of sharply defined contrasting states notably competent or incompetent and autonomous or dependent, and that these states are exacerbated by increasing age. Kenyon effectively highlights the ageist assumption associated with advanced old age which is that chronology of ageing becomes the hierarchy of ageing (Itzin1986), with the result that age provides an indicator of the extent of an individual's dependence. The reality is that older people experience these juxtapositions in a similar manner to younger people, with the result that such extreme positions are often mitigated by circumstance and that age *per se* is not a good indicator of dependence.

The other issue related to autonomy and competence for Kenyon is his assertion that dependence does not equate to biographical inactivity. The assumptions and associations which link dependence with a lack of autonomy and incompetence may again be informed by the pernicious nature of ageism and how older people are constructed within an inherently ageist society. In both of these aspects of the framework, viewing older individuals objectively, rather than being influenced by ageist assumptions, is very important and, in this respect, highlights the importance of the value base of both the research and the researcher. The promulgation of ageist assumptions through the research process will inevitably present results that do not reflect the reality of the situation in which older people are located within our society and therefore will reflect dominant hegemonic attitudes. These issues have been raised in Chapter 2 specifically related to the research on the lives of older lesbians and gay men in the 1970s and 80s.

Kenyon identifies three broad **ground rules** for ageing and biographical research, namely:

- The specificity of the approach employed,
- Reflection on the conceptions, attitudes and meaning of ageing,
- Universality.

With reference to the former, the overarching term biographical approach contains a number of specific methods such as life review and reminiscence which have clear and stated therapeutic and cathartic outcomes and which require specially trained therapists to employ effectively. Kenyon's concern is that purpose will be confused with method. Thus, under the guise of biography, a method will be employed for a research purpose that is intended for therapeutic benefit and, as a result of a lack of training or inappropriate training, harm will come to the respondents. The methodology that I adopted within my research is that of biographical oral history, which employed guided or themed interviews, related to the subject of the research. As Kenyon (1996) notes, a similar approach – guided autobiography – is not a form of therapy although it may have unintended therapeutic outcomes. In this respect the, specificity of my research process was very clear and, whilst therapeutic outcomes for the individual may be an effect of the process of reviewing their life, such an outcome is not intended. However, this does not negate the potential that the act of remembering the past can be distressing. As a result, I needed to be aware that individual older lesbians or gay men may have become upset about the issues that were being discussed and to ensure, as much as practicable, that they were emotionally safe at the end of the interview. This, in essence continues, Kenyon's underlying themes of practical ethics – of ensuring that the individual is not harmed by the research process and

that an appropriate response and support is offered in the event of distress being caused.

The second ground rule requires researchers to reflect on their own conceptions and values in respect of meaning and ageing thus clarifying whose story is being told within the context of the 'biographical encounter'. Sankar and Gubrium comment that:

'attention to meaning is far more complex than simply asking open-ended questions and allowing participants to speak extemporaneously. It requires a heightened sense of self-awareness about the researcher's personal understandings, beliefs and world view.'

(1994:xiv, cited in Kenyon 1996:666)

This refers to the researcher bringing their own biographical view to the interview, rather than trying to understand the world from the point of view of the respondent, which has the result that the interpretation is achieved through the values of the researcher. The objective is to ensure that understanding is achieved from the point of view of the other person rather than filtered through the culture of the interpreter. This can be achieved, Kenyon argues, by the researcher being knowledgeable and experienced in respect of issues related to ageing and later life, thereby being better able to understand the subtleties of the issues being raised. This particular ground rule in itself refers to previously identified issues of the value base of both the research and the researcher in which it was noted that research which is predicated on ageism and researchers that are imbued with ageism will produce outcomes that reflect this dominant hegemony.

Universality is the final ground rule identified by Kenyon and refers to the role of life review within the context of healthy ageing. Kenyon reports that it is often assumed by younger people that all older people need to reflect on their life in order to achieve some resolution of past events thereby enabling them to move towards a satisfying or 'successful' later life and that such reviews are an intrinsic aspect of growing older. As an approach, biographical interviewing may assist an older person in the process of life review and be of benefit to that person.

However, as researchers we can not and must not automatically assume that all older people need or may even want to engage in the process of life review and will therefore be eager to engage with us in our research. Such broad assumptions further reflect ageist ideas about the nature and role of later life and, in direct contradiction to this view Coleman (1986) maintains that some older people are accepting of their lives and do not require to undertake such a process. The outcome is that reflecting on one's life will be a process that some older people will wish to engage with, whilst others will not. In highlighting the issues associated with the assumption of biographical review as an inherent aspect of growing older and thereby the claim to universality, my own experience of, and difficulties in, recruiting older lesbians in particular, which is discussed below, would certainly suggest that the requirement for such a review is not an inherent component of later life and this is reiterated by Kenyon who states:

'...it would not appear ethically appropriate to assume that storytelling be viewed as the key to successful ageing.'

(1996:669)

Authenticity and coherence is the final element of Kenyon's (1996) ethical framework and refers to what we can expect as researchers from a biography. Kenyon asserts that stories exist within a context or situation and are told from:

'...a point of view that changes with time, experience, and the very telling of my story, as I create, discover and am created by my world.'
(1996:669)

Furthermore, Pilkington comments:

'we are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives.'
(1988:150, cited in Kenyon 1996:669).

An individual's narrative is therefore never complete in two senses, the first being that we can never fully understand another person, with the result that the narrative is given from a particular perspective and for a specific purpose. The second is located within the idea of the biographically active person whose story is still developing and which will include the research process itself.

Our biographies comprise many stories, some of which have a clear beginning, middle and end, whilst others continue to develop and intertwine with each other. We are, as Kenyon points out:

'...private and economic stories, inner stories, public stories, physical stories, family stories, emotional stories and cultural stories.'

(1996:670)

Aspects of these stories may involve disruptions and, as a result, there may not be coherence within a story or a biography and this can be disconcerting to both the respondent and the researcher, but does not negate the story. We equally have the potential to tell the story that we want by changing the substance of it although this can clearly only be achieved within certain parameters. This idea of authenticity rests with 'facticity' and refers to:

'...the elements of our stories that include the stories we tell (and live) about ourselves, in other words, the story we already are at any point in time, as well as the social, cultural, structural, interpersonal and biological 'themes' that characterise personal lifestories.'

(Kenyon 1996:671)

In this respect, a distinction is drawn between the inauthentic that breaks the rules of the biographical engagement and a story that is the truth, albeit from a particular perspective.

Kenyon's ethical framework establishes how we as researchers should interact with our respondents and how we should view the narratives that are produced from the biographical encounter. All of which is underpinned by sound 'practical ethics' that enable us to respond, given the circumstances, in a manner which does not harm the respondent. There is considerable interconnectivity between the component elements of the framework as we see the impact of ageist assumptions in how we frame the issues of later life, how we view older people and the assumptions that are made about the experience of being an older

person. The issue of the interconnectivity of the component elements of the framework works to ensure that this ethical approach has internal coherence and, as a consequence, it is fit for purpose.

3.3 My research *process* and Kenyon's ethical framework.

The purpose of this part of the chapter is to explore key processes of my research such as the recruitment of the older lesbians and gay men, the interviewing structure and the analysis of the narratives. Kenyon's framework will be applied to these constituent elements thereby seeking to demonstrate that the entirety of my research both attained and maintained ethical standards.

Recruiting older lesbians and gay men.

The potential population for my research was every older lesbian and gay man within the United Kingdom, with crude estimates being some 1.2 million people⁹. Whilst this is quite a large population from which to draw a small group of people, inevitably other issues intervene which begin to significantly reduce the available population from which a sample can be drawn. For the purposes of my research the sample had to have the following characteristics, namely:

- People over the age of 60 years,
- People who define themselves as lesbian or gay,
- People who are cognitively able to give consent,

⁹ This estimate is drawn from population statistics produced by the Office of National Statistics (2005) accessed at www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/olderpeople/ on the 8th July 2009 and Stonewall's own estimate of the percentage of the population who are lesbian, gay and bisexual; see the following site accessed on the 8th July 2009 www.stonewall.org.uk/at_home/sexual_orientation_faqs/2694.asp

- People who are willing and able to talk at length about their early life in terms of their sexual identity and their current life.

This is a self-defining population in which these four characteristics should come together as recognised by the person concerned. As such, the people who participated in my research were self-selecting based upon their own assessment of their match to my selection criteria. Ensuring that those who volunteered met my primary requirements was undertaken at their first point of contact with me. In this respect, no other characteristics of the self were selected, however, as described below, the existence of such characteristics served to enrich the stories that were told to me. This issue of self selection addresses Kenyon's (1996) requirement for truly voluntary participation and informed consent. The primary considerations in terms of recruiting older lesbians and gay men were those of sexuality and age as this was consistent with the overall purpose of the research. Older lesbians and gay men are generally regarded as a 'hard to reach group' (see Meezan and Martin 2009), reflecting the circumstances in which they are placed. Within what are generally recognised as lesbian and gay 'communities' there tends to be an emphasis on urban spaces and commercial venues that are occupied by younger people and, in particular, by men. The consequence of this is that, in general terms, older lesbians and gay men become invisible within such environments reflecting the dominant discourse that is ageism. Associated with this is the commercial focus on younger gay men who are perceived to be unencumbered with the responsibilities of family and therefore have more disposable income. This emphasis on younger people and, in particular, younger gay men again tends to be reflected within voluntary sector organisations that serve lesbian and gay 'communities'.

Whilst lesbian and gay environments and organisations tend not to address older people within the 'community', the mainstream services that are available for all older people have a tendency to operate on the basis of the ageist assumption that all older people are asexual (Vincent 1999; Gott 2005). In such environments, older lesbians and gay men again become invisible. Given that it was not possible to obtain single or even multiple data sources from which it would be possible to identify populations of older lesbians and gay men and from which more orthodox sampling methods – e.g., random or purposive - could be applied, the sampling method that I employed had to rest within non-probability sampling (Burton 2000; May 2001; Wengraf 2001).

My recruitment strategy rested on the dual approaches of networking and snowballing - getting to know people with the objective that, if they met my criteria, they would agree to be interviewed or may, in turn, recommend me to others who may consent to be interviewed. However, the two approaches that I adopted were in themselves influenced by a number of factors: namely the cost of adopting other strategies such as advertising in the national gay press, which would have to be borne by myself, and the practical implications of interviewing the same person on a number of different occasions which would necessitate reasonable travelling time from my home. As a result, my networking activities were focused primarily in the north-west of England.

The sample size was established at six individuals. This both reflected the size of the task and ensured a variety of experiences could be explored. In terms of the size of the task, each person was interviewed on a number of occasions up to a total of five times with each interview reflecting a specific or guided theme related to the research topic (themes of the interviews will be explored below). As a

consequence, the potential existed for thirty interviews to take place and given that each interview lasted for up to one and a half hours, this represented a maximum of forty-five hours of interviewing, all of which would have to be transcribed and analysed. Attempting to ensure that a variety of lived experiences is reflected in my research presented for me very real issues that refer to the epistemological underpinning of this work. This concerns understanding what a '*variety of lived experiences*' actually means, as each of our lives reflects the circumstances in which we are situated and the meanings that we make of our life. In this respect the stories of the lives that have been lived are simply that: they are individual stories about individual people's lives. As a consequence, variety is not an issue as there is, and can be, no claim for generalisability arising from these narratives, but also these stories do reflect individual lives that have been lived and, intrinsically, by their very nature, they reflect varied life experiences.

A further consideration for me in obtaining the sample of older lesbians and gay men was the need to reflect on the gender balance. It was important to me that the research itself did not reinforce the position of oppressed groups and individuals which, if I had focused on the life stories of older gay men, would have perpetuated the invisibility of older lesbians. The gender balance thus needed to ensure that neither older lesbians nor older gay men dominated the sample. This, in part, reflects my own story as a gay man from which I could draw parallels from my own life with the stories being told by the older gay men. However, the stories and life courses of the older lesbians were much less familiar to me and were obviously not personally experienced by me. I feel that the stories of the lives of the older lesbians ensured that a very different dynamic was added to my research and raised issues of similarity and difference based on their own life experiences. A clear example of these differences was that each of the older lesbians had

married when younger and had children, whilst the older gay men had never married and did not have children.

Recruiting and interviewing six volunteers took some two years which involved me engaging with a large number of organisations and individuals from across the region. This process involved the development of trust requiring me to demonstrate my commitment beyond rhetoric to issues related to older lesbians and gay men. Whilst the strategy that I employed to recruit older lesbians and gay men in my research is a recognised and frequently employed approach, there were potential difficulties for this strategy as its success rested primarily on my own ability to network and my perceived credibility. My own credibility was in part reflected in Kenyon's (1996) references to the value base of the research and of the researcher as part of his ethical framework. I was presenting myself as genuinely interested in, and valuing, the life experiences of older lesbians and gay men which when associated with my willingness to engage with various networks and listen to what people were saying to me and, to some extent, my persistence, demonstrated both my trustworthiness and my credibility. Aware of the potential difficulties, I purposefully invested a great deal of time in making contact with various groups and individuals across the region, visiting them and ensuring that I completed any commitments to which I had agreed, such as sending copies of materials that I had written and collected.

Credibility and gender became particular issues in respect of the recruitment of older lesbians. I had reached a point in the research when I had recruited and interviewed three older gay men and there were more men who had approached me volunteering to be interviewed. However, achieving a gender balance remained an issue for me. I approached the organiser of a lesbian network who,

based on my gender, refused to pass my request on to other people within the network. A friend suggested that I post a notice on a particular website orientated towards lesbians; however, on reflection, I felt that a man accessing such a website would be too intrusive. Eventually, through a friend's recommendation, Gail made contact with me volunteering to be interviewed and she, in turn, made contact with a friend and, through her, another older lesbian. At this point I had achieved my required sample. However, there were delays in undertaking the interviews with the latter two women as events in their lives meant that they were not immediately available to be interviewed. In the following few months, a total of five older lesbians had made contact with me and had agreed to be interviewed but, in each case, the circumstances of their lives meant that there had to be a delay before I could embark on interviewing them. Janice was the first to become available, followed soon after by Rachel, which had the result that I was interviewing them concurrently although at different stages in the process of the interviews. I achieved my sample with my desired gender balance literally just within my time frame.

In terms of my sample, Ian, Robert, Janice and Rachel made contact with me through various networks and Steven and Gail contacted me based purely on the personal recommendations of other people.

Whilst sexuality and age were my primary criteria for recruitment, engaging with my research inevitably entailed a range of individual decisions which, in turn, influenced the willingness to participate in my research process. These decisions would have required recognition of themselves as falling within my selection criteria, as well as determining whether they wished to be engaged in the research on the basis of having the time, interest, willingness to tell the story of their life and

their own perception that their story was worth telling. Whilst these individual decisions about engagement were clearly very important for my research, not least because they informed whether and who would be willing to tell their story to me, such decisions were also informed by other aspects of the self and the performance of the self over the life course. Thus, whilst my selection criteria primarily focused around age and sexuality, the individuals who agreed to be interviewed by me brought with them a lifetime's experience of living and expressions of the self that went beyond my original purposive selection criteria.

As identified above, towards the end of the recruitment period, gender became particularly important if I was to achieve my original objective of interviewing the same number of women as men. In this respect, gender became a purposive selection criterion as the research developed and this was reflected in my own activities, which began to singularly focus on recruiting older lesbians. Whilst I achieved my balance of gender, the six people who participated in my research and who told me the stories of their lives brought other expressions of selves to the interviews and these also informed the nature and content of their stories.

Janice was the only person who was from an identified mixed race background, whilst the other five participants were white British in their ethnic status. Being of mixed race was very important in the story of Janice's life as she regarded this aspect of self as one of her 'treasures'. However, issues of ethnicity and ethnic background did not feature in the stories told by the other five participants. Both Robert and Gail were born and brought up outside of the geographic area that is the urban areas of the north west of England and, whilst this was not an issue for either of them, their life experiences as reflected in the stories that they chose to

tell me do make references to these differences. Thus Robert refers to the London Blitz and subsequent evacuation, and Gail tells stories of growing up in a small rural town.

All the people who participated in my research approached the interviews with their own understanding that they had stories that they wanted to tell. Ian and Rachel, without my prior knowledge, had already told their stories to others and Rachel's story, in particular, had been performed as a play in local theatres. Ian's story focused on his engagement with a very powerful London based group of gay men whilst Steven's story was about his experience of 'coming out' in the early 1970s. The interviews with Steven involved the telling of the story of this event, the reaction to his sexuality and his engagement in sexual politics. Janice's story involved her own awakening and understanding of what it meant to be an older black lesbian. Robert was keen to tell the story of his awakening sexuality after the death of his mother in the mid 1980s and his continued engagement with other men for the purpose of group sex. Gail's stories included a clear articulation of her political understanding of the position of women in society, which featured throughout the interviews with her.

Shortly after starting the interviews, Ian's long-standing relationship with his partner came to an end, which he found very difficult, whilst acknowledging later that telling the story of his life helped him in part to get over the break-up of this relationship. Rachel's poor physical health severely restricted her engagement with people other than those who looked after her and, in this respect, Rachel commented outside of the interviews that she both enjoyed telling the story of her life and having the company that was part of this process.

Decisions to engage in my research by telling the story of their lives were made individually by the people who participated in my research. Such decisions were influenced by many factors not least their individual belief that their story was worth telling. This decision was very important for my research as it afforded me the opportunity to listen and understand the stories of the lives of these older lesbians and gay men. Whilst these factors were very important for my research and were essentially beyond my control, my ability to potentially influence this decision involved establishing a sense that those who participated would be and were treated with respect and dignity and that their stories were valued for what they were - individual stories of people's lives that had been, and were being, lived.

Chapter 7 contains an acknowledgement and a much more detailed discussion of the constructs of self that were influential within my research that go beyond age and sexuality, which are the primary focus of this work. This discussion includes the influence of class, race and ethnicity, whiteness, parenthood and what it means to be single. Each of these additional constructs of self inform how the individual perceives and constructs their understanding of what it means to be an older lesbian or gay man.

Interviews

In respect of the interviews, there were a number of process and content issues that need to be explored. These issues were related both to my knowledge and previous experience of interviewing and the processes and choices that were

available to me, together with my own competence at undertaking such an interview. Each of these areas will be explored below initially with an examination of my knowledge base.

The interviews were undertaken on a one-to-one basis, they were semi-structured and in depth. Wengraf identifies a number of features of in-depth interviewing, namely:

- *'The interview is a research interview, designed for the purpose of improving knowledge,*
- *It is a special type of conversational interaction: in some ways it is like other conversations, but it has special features which need to be understood,*
- *It has to be planned and prepared for like other forms of research activity...,*
- *It is to go into matters 'in depth'.'*

(2001:3)

In elucidating these points, Wengraf is very clear in his assertion that *'...the research interview is not designed to 'help' or 'empower', or 'change' the informant at al.'* (2001:4). Rather, for Wengraf, the research interview is about obtaining data related to a specific aspect of social reality and then developing and testing a model which seeks to afford greater understanding of that reality. In this respect, Wengraf's clarity about the purpose of the interview reflects Kenyon's own

assertion that the purpose and method should not be confused as the research interview is not intended to have therapeutic outcomes.

Flick (1998) outlines a number of approaches to or types of semi-structured interviews, which imply both structure and process. The approaches are identified below, although I will only focus on the last type of interview:

- The focused interview,
- The semi-standardised interview,
- The problem centred interview,
- The expert interview,
- The ethnographic interview.

The ethnographic interview is described by Spradley as '*... a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants*' (1979:58-9). Whilst specifically referring to ethnographic interviews, Spradley identifies an important aspect of qualitative interviewing, namely the reference to a conversation between the respondent(s) and the interviewer. Thus the data collection device – the interview - is an allegory of an exchange in the manner of a conversation and should therefore conform to the conventions of such an exchange. Failure to do so would leave the conversation awkward in how it is conducted and uncomfortable in its experience. Establishing that an interview is a conversation does not acknowledge the specifics of the data collection device, in that there is a prelude and a conclusion to this process which may not be regarded as part of the interview. Thus the researcher and the respondent meet and greet each other, exchange pleasantries

and agree to proceed at which point the interview begins and possibly the tape recorder is switched on. When the interview is finished, the tape is switched off and further conversational exchanges will take place between the participants. I have highlighted this apparently simple process solely because of the differences in undertaking an interview. Wengraf identifies the SQUIN (Single-Question-aimed-at-inducing-narrative) as an approach to qualitative interviews which is in stark contrast to Atkinson's (1998) much more conversationally orientated approach. The SQUIN approach postulates a single question from which a narrative flows and all other interventions on the part of the researcher are kept to a minimum. In undertaking this approach, Wengraf (2001) argues that the researcher gives up control in favour of the respondent and that the researcher is strongly urged to maintain silence as they listen to the narrative.

In contrast, Atkinson (1998) produces over 200 questions related primarily to life stages, which can be used to encourage a respondent to talk and thereby produce a narrative. Atkinson's approach much more closely reflects conversational conventions whilst still focusing on the purpose of the exchange which is to establish data related to a theme. Given the focus of my research, I wanted to establish not only what has happened in the person's life but, of equal importance, how they felt about what was happening to them and what sense they made of this and, in order to facilitate this, I adopted a purposeful conversational approach.

I felt that Wengraf's encouragement to silence by the researcher in the interviewing process would not assist in the establishment of the data that was an essential aspect of my research. His approach, because it does not maintain the accepted conventions of conversational exchanges, may leave respondents feeling awkward and uncomfortable during the interview process. I am not arguing

for a prominent role in the interview for the researcher, but rather for the flexibility of continuing to focus the interview by asking additional questions when appropriate. The questions outlined by Atkinson (1998) are open in nature, thus encouraging the respondent to talk and thereby to produce a narrative. The absence of a rigid and fixed structure permits flexibility in terms of the order in which issues are discussed within the guided focus of the interview. This also facilitates the exploration of emotions and meanings relating to how the individual older lesbian and gay man felt about the experience of forming their sexual identity and of growing old. Responses made by the researcher should be more open-ended and enable the respondent to elaborate on issues. Denscombe (1998) suggests that, in practice, most interviews range across a continuum between semi-structured and unstructured formats and that this allows respondents to use their own words and to speak their own minds. This is the key to my research in terms of understanding the meaning given by the individual to specific events and the impact that this has had on their sense of self.

An emphasis on a slow introduction of elements into the interview avoids what may be interpreted or felt as an interrogation during which *'rapport will evaporate, and informants may discontinue their cooperation'* (Spradley 1979:58-99). Spradley goes on to suggest that the process of establishing the interview assists in separating out a friendly conversation from an ethnographic interview. Thus the specific request to conduct the interview, outlining the purposes of the interview, and asking specific but facilitating questions establishes that a friendly conversation has a distinct purpose.

The approach that I employed established that the interviews were 'purposeful conversations' that had contexts which included the events or conversations that

took place prior to and after the interviews; that each individual interview had an association with earlier exchanges and that these formed the basis of a research relationship between myself and the individual. By undertaking a 'purposeful conversation' my objective was to achieve an interaction that was conducted in a manner that ensured that the older lesbian or gay man felt relaxed, that they were respected and were being afforded dignity. My aspiration was that, in such an environment, the performativity, interaction, presentation and storytelling/listening features of the interview were as much as possible unencumbered by additional artifices which may have acted to inhibit the telling of the stories about their lives and, in particular, the telling of stories that are inherently private.

Denscombe (1998) maintains that, in undertaking the interview, it must be clearly understood between the interviewee and the interviewer that consent has been given and that such consent should be informed based upon their knowledge of the purpose of the interview and the research in general. In this respect Denscombe reflects Kenyon's ethical framework by asserting that participating in any research should be undertaken truly voluntarily and with informed consent. The process of ensuring that my research participants truly volunteered their informed consent is described above.

The practical arrangements of time and place were established in writing prior to initial interviews with all of the older lesbians and gay men and after each interview was concluded the next was scheduled. At the start, and whilst scheduling the next interview, I was very clear to establish with the individual that they were happy to continue being interviewed by me. The first set of interviews was undertaken in my office at the university. However, I found that both during and

immediately after the interviews my employment role significantly intruded into this research space and resulted in confusion and a degree of haste as I had to move on to other tasks. As a result, I decided that I would conduct the interviews away from my place of employment and ensure that I blocked out the whole day in order that the focus should remain with the research interview and the person who was telling me their story. All the subsequent interviews (some 21 interviews) took place with the agreement of the individual in their own home. In the preparation for each interview I made an arrangement to contact a friend at a specified time to say that I was leaving or had left the interview, and they were given a sealed envelope containing the address of the person I was interviewing with instructions only to open the envelope if I had not made contact to say that I was safe.

The interviews were, with the agreement of the person concerned, audio-recorded and backed up by field notes, the purpose of which was to establish a record of the interview, be as unobtrusive as possible and therefore reduce the influence of recording on the respondent. The addition of field notes provided some backup to the interview in case anything happened to the tape and enabled me to record some of my thought processes whilst conducting the interview.

The second issue to be addressed in this section is the competence of the researcher to undertake interviews and this, in turn, reflects on the skills that are recognised as being required of an interviewer and, of course, a synergy between these two elements. As a qualified and experienced social worker, I had developed skills and experience related to engaging with older people in a variety of circumstances and settings and this afforded for me the skills base upon which to undertake the interviews. Denscombe (1998) identifies six key skills for the research interviewer and Davies (1985) identifies ten principles for social work

interviews (outlined below). There is a great deal of commonality between these suggesting that, whilst each type of interview has its own focus, there is a synergy in terms of the skills required in undertaking an interview. As a qualified social worker whose practice was working with older people, I have had many years' experience of interviews employing the skills associated with such a process. In addition to, and interwoven with, the principles of interviewing outlined by Davies is the value base of social work which is reflected in the concept of anti-oppressive practice and which is also associated with the professional requirement of reflection. As a result, social work practitioners are required to explore how their own value base has impacted on the situation in which service users are placed with a consequent effect on outcomes. In this respect, the skills base that I had developed as a social worker ensured that I was able to engage, undertake the interview with an appropriate focus, ensure that the individual was treated with respect and with dignity and that I was able to reflect 'in' and 'on' the interviews (see Schon 1983, 1991, 1992).

<p>Denscombe's (1998) six key skills for the Interviewer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be attentive,• Be sensitive to the feelings of the interviewee,• Be able to tolerate silences,• Be adept at using prompts,• Be adept at using probes,• Be adept at using checks in understanding the information.	<p>Davies' (1985) ten principles for social work interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Letting the interviewee know how much time there is,• Starting where the client is in their understanding of the situation,• Trying to be sympathetic so as to help make the atmosphere relaxed,• Trying to see things through the other person's eyes,• Knowing the danger of passing judgement rather than acceptance,• Developing social skills such as smiling to help open out communication,• Avoiding questions that can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no',• Not putting answers in the client's mouth,• Not probing too deeply too quickly,• Learning to cope with silences.
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Fig. 1 Synergies in the skills base required for qualitative interviewing and social work interviews.

The interviews were thematically guided and were organised in the following manner:

Interview 1 Base biographical information and genealogy,

Interview 2 Early life,

Interview 3 Development of sexuality,

Interview 4 Adulthood,

Interview 5 Later life.

The purpose of the first interview, which was arranged over the telephone, sought to establish basic information such as date and place of birth, birth family structure, current family structure, education, key events and employment history. This biographical data was employed by me to structure the subsequent interviews and to make reference to specific events thereby personalising both the questions and the process. Whilst I had structured the interviews around key life stages based on the information obtained during the first interview, each of the older lesbians and gay men would, reflecting the events in their own lives, establish their own meaning and definition of these life stages. Thus, in response to the broad question 'When were you first aware of your attraction to your own sex?', each person responded to reflect the events in their own life. This self definitional process was particularly important when it came to talking about issues of later life as all but one of the participants, unprompted by me, signified the start of later life as being the point of retirement. This issue, and the definition of the start of later life, is developed further in Chapter 5.

At the end of the series of interviews, each of the older lesbians and gay men were asked by me whether they felt that I had missed any aspect of their life that they felt was important in terms of facilitating an understanding of their life. All but one person responded positively. However, the person who was the exception to this response stated that there were aspects of their life that remained both personal and upsetting to them and, as a result, they had not, and would not, share these stories with other people. This decision, I felt, needed to be acknowledged and respected so I did not press for further details and thanked them for sharing what they felt they could discuss with me.

Analysis of the interviews

Each interview was transcribed by me and was a process which took, on average, three days. In transcribing the interviews, I consciously decided that I was not preparing the transcription for discourse or semiotic analysis as I was more concerned about the themes that were emerging rather than the manner in which the individual was discussing these issues. Given this focus within the process of transcription, I chose not to punctuate the transcripts but rather to allow the words in the order that they were spoken to be recorded. There is, of course, an associated difficulty related to the punctuation of speech which, as an example, raises the issue of how to record a pause and whether it represents the end of a sentence and is thereby required to be punctuated with a full stop.

From the point of establishing the research questions, my central focus was on how the older lesbians and gay men made sense of the events that had happened

and were happening to them and that they were both acting and reacting to circumstances in which they were situated with agency. It was also clear that they were in interaction with other agentic selves and that these interactions were set within the context of broader social structures. These broader social structures acted in particular ways or with particular effects, most notably in the early part of their lives to enforce negative perceptions of them as lesbians and gay men.

In terms of the analysis, and given the research questions, exploring the interface between structure and agency was going to be important. However, an additional aspect of the analysis emerged which became very influential and which developed out of continual reflexivity. This additional component emerged from different influences and resulted in me questioning how the interviews were being performed and the effect of this on the outcome of the interviews. This reflexivity was triggered by two sets of events which occurred with three of the people who had volunteered to become part of my research.

The first set of events refers to people who had a story that they wanted to tell. Ian, Rachel and Janice had such stories and were keen to tell me about them. For Ian, this story was about his involvement with a very powerful and wealthy group of gay men based in London. Ian introduced this aspect of his life towards the end of the second interview and it was picked up during the third interview. In a similar manner, Rachel also had a story that she wanted to tell, which involved her life as a dominatrix prostitute. It was clear that both of these stories had been independently rehearsed and possibly told many times before. Janice did not have a specific story to be told but rather her story was about the process of her awakening awareness of oppression - a process that took most of her adult life.

This idea of an awakening features throughout all of her interviews and influenced the pattern of the interviews, given that she found it very difficult to respond to my questions preferring instead to tell this story of awakening.

The second set of events occurred outside of the interviews at an event at which both Ian and I were attending (I was at this time heavily engaged in networking in order to establish my credibility as a researcher). One of the founding members of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) was coming to make a presentation to a group organised by Age Concern Manchester. By this time I had undertaken a number of interviews with Ian who, in his narrative, had made it very clear that he was very proud of the fact that he was not dishonourably discharged from the Royal Navy. Being dishonourably discharged would have resulted in the corner of his papers being cut off and would have affected his pension entitlement. As a career sailor he was placed on the reservist list and therefore he remained vulnerable to the potential of a dishonourable discharge and loss of his pension entitlement for many years after formally leaving the Navy. At this meeting, Ian and I were generally talking and he mentioned that he knew the speaker very well and had known him for a very long time based on his active membership of CHE. I watched as Ian approached the speaker to engage him in conversation and it became very clear that Ian's understanding of a relationship based on many years of association was not shared. The dissonance between Ian's presentation of himself during this period and the reaction of the speaker prompted a long period of reflection on my part as I tried to make sense of this exchange and the nature of the impact that this might have on both his narrative and in a more general sense on the interpretation or analysis of the stories that I was obtaining.

This process of reflection explored a number of possibilities including:

1. That Ian was lying about his engagement with CHE resulting in the potential that other aspects of his narrative contained lies.
2. That he was re-exploring his past in order to present himself in a different manner and that this was nothing other than the changing meaning of social action within the context of a changed social environment.
3. That the other man had reasons to distance himself from Ian.
4. That Ian was re-inventing his past to reflect the conditions of the present thereby continuing to both manage the presentation of himself and negotiate the process of self-making.

This extended period of reflection drew me towards the latter point and, in particular, how, through his life, he and other older lesbians and gay men had to be very aware of how they were presenting themselves to others and the implication of this on their life in successfully and unsuccessfully managing their presentation to others. My reflection explored the narratives of his time in the Navy when both military regulations and the criminal law would have responded harshly if Ian had been caught having sex with another man. Equally, contained within his narratives is a clear understanding that if other people even thought that he was gay this could cause him considerable problems. This had a consequence for each of the gay men that I interviewed in terms of the pattern of the relationships in which they engaged through most of their adult life. For Ian, this meant short term relationships lasting no longer than the period of a military posting. This became a matter of survival as it would become more and more difficult to explain why he was visiting or being visited by someone he had met

during a previous posting. The average period of a posting was two years. The implication of this was that Ian and the other gay men had become very skilful, through necessity, in managing how others perceived them and, whilst these were not skills that were exclusively associated with gay men, they were associated with survival.

In terms of the interviews, the implications were that Ian was managing my perception of him and he was doing this through the telling of stories about his life. My reflection also involved exploring how I presented myself to other people and I began to understand that managing the presentation of self was pivoted primarily around the desire to be liked and thought well of and that this was made manifest in different ways to reflect the audience and the impression that I wanted them to have of me. I would tell some stories about my life and not others: I would emphasise different parts of stories and different aspects of my life; I was in essence managing the presentation of myself in everyday life (Goffman 1982). This insight, I felt, had important implications for this type of interviewing with the result that I should take this understanding into the analysis of the interviews by exploring **how** the stories were being told.

It became clear from reading and rereading the narratives that there was a pattern in how the individuals were telling their stories within the backdrop of managing their presentation of themselves. This pattern had three distinct elements which involved:

- Discussion of the here and now,
- Discussion of the past for the here and now,

- Discussion of the past.

This pattern reflected the content of the interviews in that as well as discussing the past, references were being made to the present and, in presenting their past, there was a clear distinction between actually presenting events and conversations that took place some time ago and presenting the past from the perspective of the present. In addition to these distinct elements, each interview was also analysed exploring the relationship between structure and agency.

The starting point for the analysis of each of the interviews was the transcripts themselves and, within these, the narratives and stories that were being told by the older lesbians and gay men. Whilst the analysis of each of the interviews involved exploring the individual narratives in order to identify emergent themes, I felt it was extremely important that, at each point of this seven-stage process, it was possible to refer back to the originating comments contained within the transcripts.

Stage one of the analysis started with a Word document set up in landscape format. The left-hand side of the page contained the transcription of the interview in short lines each of which were numbered whilst the right-hand side of the page contained two text boxes, which ran parallel to the transcript from the top to the bottom of the page. The text boxes were employed to annotate the text to reflect issues that were emerging. The interviews were then read four times focusing on each occasion on a particular element of the analysis, thus the first reading focused on issues of structure and agency within the text: the second on issues within the text which were related to the here and now (referred to in the analysis

as the first order of presentation); the third on discussions of the past with reference to the here and now (second order of presentation) and the final reading related to issues within the text in which stories of the past were being directly recounted (third order of presentation). Each annotation was given a very brief description, which captured and summarised the main issues that were being highlighted within the narrative (see Appendix B for further illustration of this process). Reading the transcripts four times ensured that I became immersed within the textual transcriptions of the interviews thus allowing me to focus on those aspects of the narratives that were related to the research questions.

The examples below have been drawn from the texts to illustrate how the four main elements of the analysis were employed. In terms of the structure and agency element of the analysis, we can see below how Gail is acknowledging the effect of structure on her agency. Gail refers to her decision to carry on working despite her desire to retire. Her decision is directly related to the value of her pension and its impact on her quality of life after finishing work, which, in turn, is a consequence of her pension contribution record.

'...if I could afford I think I would retire now...and I cant afford to retire –if I work till I am 65 – I will have 16 years and 1 month – whatever – in the [name] pension scheme – if I retire before then I would obviously be looking at a reduced pension...so if I retired now instead of 3 years time – that will cost me £3000 per year – in my pension – so that is a lot of money.'

(Gail 30/4/07)

In this next extract, the focus of the analysis is on a discussion about the here and now in which Steven refers to the absence of a partner in his life and his feelings about such relationships, both positive and negative:

'...in my state at the present moment – no partner – nobody to look after me but of course the partner could be my age or much younger and needing me but there is the loneliness that might come from aloneness that might come when you are isolated as you get older anyway – but that happens to married people doesn't it – like my father there was a certain amount of loneliness element in his last few years because of his demographic isolation.'

(Steven 4/9/06)

In terms of discussions about the past for the here and now that were taking place within the interviews, this extract from the first interview with Ian was one of a number of examples in which he made claims about being different and having special characteristics. In terms of managing the presentation of self during the interviews, these claims asserted his own sense of self based upon his belief that his special characteristics and the story of his life were both unusual and worth telling:

'All the new little scrubbed 5 years olds sat there - teacher in the front – anyone know their alphabets – nasty little bastard at the back [referring to himself] – front wards or backwards miss – teacher – I've got this one by

the balls – backwards – zyx what about cba – she never said another word for a full week to me.'

(Ian 20/4/05)

The final aspect of stage one of the analysis involved identifying parts of the interviews in which the individual was telling stories which were situated in the past. In this extract Rachel is describing how she hid the money that she was earning from prostitution in her daughter's pram:

'...and all of a sudden I heard this shriek – and it was me daughter – she had tipped the dolls pram up – and this money went flying down the street because it was windy – so I run downstairs in me nightie – and I am saying pick it up trying to whisper because of him – I put it down me nightie – and I looked up and there he bloody was – so he says where's all this come from then – so I says to him you wont believe me if I tell you so I said I have been involved in a scam with some gangsters and he said I bloody knew you'd end up like that – so with that he helps me to pick the remaining money in the street because I was by the distraught about having been found out'

(Rachel 30/9/07)

Given that the first stage of the analysis involved highlighting aspects of the text which were related to the research questions and annotating that section with a

very brief summary of its content, the second stage of the analysis involved bringing the highlighted and annotated sections together under the heading of each element of the analysis (structure and agency; the here and now; the past for the here and now and the past). This involved setting up a new Word file with two text boxes each taking half the page vertically. In the left--hand text box the annotated aspects of the transcript related to each of the elements were copied from the original, which included the relevant line numbers and the brief description of the content of the annotated text. The analysis here again involved systematically reviewing the transcripts on four occasions as the annotated texts for each of the elements were brought together. The third stage involved identifying emergent themes by reviewing the summaries within each of the elements of the analysis. This involved bringing together the summaries, which addressed similar themes, placing them in the text box on the right-hand side of the page and giving these groupings a name which reflected their content. This process was undertaken again four times focusing on structure and agency, and the presentation of self within the narratives. These broader summarising names became the emergent themes.

The fourth stage of the analysis involved a new Word file set up in landscape format which contained a text box for each of the emerging themes and within which the brief descriptions were also presented. The objective was to present on one page, for each of the associated elements of the analysis, the identified emerging themes and the relevant components in order that further connections could be made between the emerging themes.

Connectivity forms the fifth stage of the analysis. The objective of this stage of the analysis was to explore the connections between the emergent themes and involved another Word file set up in landscape format within which text boxes were established containing the name of the emerging theme. The sixth stage of the analysis involved my narrative summary of each of the interviews.

The final stage, which gave rise to the three broad themes of 'self' that have been employed within the thesis, started with the visual presentations of the analysis that are contained within stage five. This lengthy and intuitive process involved being immersed with the visual presentations and searching for broad coherent themes by exploring the connections between the themes that emerged from the narratives. Many different combinations and broad themes were identified and, in turn, rejected. Through this process it became increasingly clear that the narratives and the emergent themes all involved expressions of the self - the self as natural, the self as a woman or man and the self as an older person. The themes and sub-themes that emerged out of this process are reflected in this thesis in terms of three of the chapters which are:

- Chapter 6 - The self as different.
 - The claim to the naturalness of their sexuality
 - Separation - as older lesbians and gay men their experiences through the life course has meant that they are not the same as other people.
- Chapter 7 - The self as political.

- The social construction of masculinity and femininity which has meant that as lesbians and gay men their lives have taken differing trajectories based on gender
- Additional expressions of the self which inform the sense of self
- Stories of intersecting of genders.
- Chapter 8 - The self as ageing.
 - The positive and negative stories of being older people
 - The complexities involved in being the self that is old
 - Transitions and continuity.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to establish both the nature of my research practice and the process that I undertook whilst undertaking the research. In both instances achieving and maintaining a practice and process that was ethically sound was very important to me. Kenyon's (1996) ethical framework has been very influential in that it has enabled me to articulate my research practice and approach within a clear framework and ensure that my approach is referenced to and conformed to high standards of ethical practice.

This chapter has also brought an end to the context setting section of this thesis in that my own background as the researcher and the reasons for undertaking this research have been contextualised. In addition the social environment in which the participants in my research - the older lesbians and gay men - grew up and developed a sense of themselves has also been explored. Finally in this chapter,

the actual process of undertaking my research has been placed within the context of an ethical framework.

The next two chapters which comprise the section of the thesis entitled '*Voices*' articulate some of the stories that each of the older lesbians and gay men told me during the research interviews. These stories are organised to reflect the events that occurred to them as younger people and which were influential in establishing their individual sense of self and also their sense of their sexual self. The following chapter reflects their stories about ageing and growing older and the effect that this has had on their sense of self.

Section 2 - Voices and stories

In this section, as the story of the research moves on from setting the context, it is important to hear the voices of, and listen to the stories that the older lesbians and gay men have told me about their lives. These stories about events that have happened in their lives are the foundations upon which they establish meaning for who they are and make sense of their selves. This section of the thesis has two chapters through which the narrative voices are organised and individual stories are told.

In the first chapter (Chapter 4), the stories are organised to reflect the early lives of the older lesbians and gay men which include their memories and stories about the awareness and development of their sexuality and the meanings that they gave to this. In the second chapter (Chapter 5), the voices are about what it means to them to be older people and the stories are about their individual experiences from which they draw such meaning.

There are consistent themes in both chapters which are related to how they engaged in processes of self-making and negotiated the tensions involved in constructing a self that is the 'other'. The earlier stories are clearly set within a time frame in which, as established in the previous section, it was illegal for a man to have sex with another man and both lesbians and gay men were the subject of severe social reaction and sanctions. Self-making therefore became very important as they were developing a sense of their sexual self against the background of a dominant expression of sexuality. Their stories also quite clearly indicate that in self-making not only did they establish themselves as the 'other',

but they were also negotiating their own understanding and expression of lesbian and gay sexuality.

Now that they are older people, these processes of self making and negotiating self have not ceased. As their voices and their stories clearly indicate, they are engaged in this dynamic process of managing the tensions involved in making the self, a self who is an older person and who is lesbian or gay.

These voices and stories are about individual people talking in their own way within the context of guided interviews. In doing so, they are highlighting what is important to them in their understanding of who they are. I have tried to ensure that, in editing the material for both chapters, I have focused on the stories that the older lesbians and gay men themselves have acknowledged as important to them.

Chapter 4 - Voices 1: Early lives

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the voices of the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research and their reflections on the events that occurred to them earlier in their lives. Each person has defined the storytelling frame based on their own lives and the events that have occurred to them which they feel are significant.

The focus for the interviews that concerned this part of their lives was on their awareness of their emerging sexuality and how this affected their lives as they grew into adulthood. Necessarily, each person chose their own starting point and the point at which the earlier part of their life ended. Invariably, there are areas of synergy and of difference between their life courses which will be explored in the next section of this work. However, we can see that the men assert that they were aware of their attraction to their own sex from a very early age, whilst for the women this awareness is located later in the life course. All the women married and had children, whilst the men were unmarried and did not have children. The men's lives, on the whole, continued in a linear trajectory, whilst the women's lives were significantly disrupted as a consequence of their awareness of their sexual attraction to other women and their subsequent separation and divorce.

The voices and the stories clearly indicate that whilst the older lesbians and gay men were engaged in negotiating the meaning of self in a self-making process with the objective of understanding what it means to be lesbian and gay, they were not doing this in isolation, either from other lesbians or gay men or from their

families and friends. In this chapter, we will see how they negotiated these relationships in different ways all of which adds substance to their own understandings of how they were and are lesbians or gay men.

4.2 The voices

The voices are presented in this and subsequent chapters as individual narratives and in the form of free flowing speech which, in turn, reflects my decision in transcribing the interviews to record their stories as spoken rather than to attempt to fit the spoken word into the conventions of punctuated text.

The voices are presented here in chronological order of their birth and the date references are associated with the date of the relevant interview. The names employed in this thesis are not the real names of the individual older lesbians and gay men.

4.2.1 Ian

Born in 1930 in a suburb of a large urban area in the north of England; Ian was adopted shortly after his birth, growing up in his adopted family without knowledge of the adoption until he was fourteen which coincided with the death of his adoptive mother. Ian does have some knowledge of both his birth mother and father, recalling meeting each of them separately on one occasion at different stages of his childhood and adolescence. Whilst Ian had no further contact with his birth parents, he does comment in tones of admiration that his birth father was required to contribute to the cost of supporting him and that his father maintained these payments until he started working.

In terms of sexuality Ian states that he '*...did know where [his] sexual preferences was – I knew from being 8'* (Ian 21/4/05). He goes on to explain this comment:

'I can take you to place that I gave my first blow job at 8 (laugh) If that's not sexual preference I don't know what is - but I knew from being little you know when we were kiddies - 5, 6, 7 year olds we were playing nurses and doctors - I never wanted to examine the girls I always wanted to examine the boys - I was the doctor - I wanted to examine the boys – not the girls - I just wasn't interested in the girls - I just never was - I - you know - I don't know how to put - girls just didn't interest me. I had a cousin - not a cousin really because it was a cousin of the family... and they had a daughter...and at the age of about 8 or 9...she wanted to - she was at the experimental stage of little girls and she wanted to see what I got between my legs and wanted to show me what she had - but I wasn't interested in what she got - yuck - no...But I was at (primary school) and I was allowed into the big boys toilets - not the infants toilets - and you are not going to believe this - but I could pee over the wall - there was a big 6 foot wall in front of us where you peed - if you could pee over the wall you went into the big boys toilet - and I went to the big boys toilet and I met the bigger boys - you learn - you became more sort of um involved in their teen - you know sort of - teenage activities - early teenage activities 11 or 12 year olds - when you were only 8 or 9 - as I say I had a friend of mine - he was 14 - and I gave him - it was his first blow job as well and it was my one - and I knew what I was doing. He had no - he didn't um - he didn't take advantage of me - I don't think he knew what was happening but I knew what I wanted

- I knew what he had and I knew what I was going to do with it - and don't ask me how I knew - it was natural

(lan 31/5/05)

Ian locates his behaviour in the context of naturalness - it was and felt perfectly natural for him to do this. When asked how he understood and made sense of what was happening to him and what he was doing, he refers to two more sets of ideas: pleasure and consequences. In terms of the former, he comments that he was brought up with the principle of not hurting anybody and he viewed his actions as giving pleasure to the other boy and not hurting him. As far as consequences are concerned, he is very clear that:

'...anything to do with playground toilets you didn't tell no body - parents teachers - nobody - type thing - this was - whether it was boys girls or mixed - like what went on behind the bike shed - type thing - you didn't tell anybody - it was taboo to adults to mention it - we knew that but um - its hard - you knew it hadn't got to be mentioned...to adults cause it was naughty - you were using naughty words possibly - um but otherwise I couldn't see I was doing anything wrong the way you would - if you had been hurting somebody - put it this way - if I had been raped by a man at that age and it hurt - I probably had a completely different attitude - but I never got involved with that - in fact the first adult that I got involved with was when I was about 15 - 14 or 15 and that was purely at my instigation.'

(lan 31/5/05)

As Ian grew older, his pattern of social networks and therefore the opportunities for same sex activity changed and he reports that there were two broad areas in which same sex activity continued as part of his life. The first concerns anonymous sexual contact outside of his known associates. In the town in which he grew up there were:

'...three notorious cottages'¹⁰ in (name of the town) in the 40s - one the army used one the RAF used and believe it or not one the police used
(Ian 31/5/05)

From the age of fourteen he was using the 'cottages' on a regular basis in wartime blackout¹¹ conditions in order to have anonymous sex with men. The second opportunity for him to engage in same sex activity during this period was with his friends. This contact was masked by a seemingly innocent activity which was encouraged by their parents:

'...during the summer we went camping at weekends - walking and camping you know - that was a good excuse you know - most parents were always for their lads getting out - especially if they are working in factories or engineering works - going to get some fresh air at the weekends type thing - you were never stopped put it that way - um so there were those opportunities - away from your mum's and dad's eyes all the time - or somebody else's mums and dads eyes...'
(Ian 31/5/05)

¹⁰ The term 'cottages' in a United Kingdom context refers to public toilets in which men had sex with other men. In North America cottages would more generally be referred to as 'tearooms'.

¹¹ During the 1939-1945 war – the use of external lights at night in the United Kingdom was prohibited establishing what were referred to as 'blackout' conditions. The objective was to confuse or not assist the German Air Force to identify targets for night time bombing.

As he grew up and moved into his mid to late teenage years, he was aware that the consequences of getting caught had changed from an initial belief that he would be sent to bed by his parents without any supper to the very real consequences of being caught by the police and punished in an adult context:

'...as time went on as you got older you realised that what you were doing wasn't the sin getting caught was the sin - you just didn't get caught that was the sin - cause if you got caught it was in the press it was everywhere - you know - somebody was going to - especially if you got caught by the police doing something in a public place as it were.'

(Ian 31/5/05)

He joined the Royal Navy in 1948 and served 16 years, leaving in 1964. Whilst in the Navy, he achieved considerable success as a long-distance runner, an activity that enabled him to avoid many of the routines of the Navy and afforded him much less scrutiny in terms of his sexuality as the assumption was that sportsmen could not be gay. This provided a cover for the absence of women in his life because, for the purposes of appearance, he was far too busy as a successful sportsman to be involved with women. Whilst in the Navy, Ian did have sexual relationships with men which inevitably were limited in time to the duration of his various postings (an average of two years). Ian reports that, on one occasion whilst on leave in between postings, he met an art gallery owner who was part of an exclusive network of very wealthy and powerful gay men who were based in London. For a number of years Ian became involved with this group and, on one occasion, he

was invited to the home of a very senior ranking naval officer and was introduced to his sons:

'...he invited - later on in the year - September time - invited me to go to his home for a weekend so I said - yes very nice so I could take a couple of days away - and er we went to his home and I met his two sons - one son - he was about my age the other was about 18ish and er they had no objection to daddy having a boyfriend as it were...'

(lan 20/6/05)

His admission to the group was based on two key elements, the first, as he describes below, is his physical appearance - *'just look beautiful'* - and the second was how he presented himself in terms of his conduct, as he states in the subsequent interview he knew how to use a knife and fork. Quite simply, he looked beautiful and he knew how to behave:

'I wasn't having to look over my shoulder - the clubs we went into would never have been raided - too many people who were too important - I will not mention names ever - um I was taken out to dinners, I was taken out to first nights I went to some of [name of art gallery owner] - some of the shows that [name] put on at his gallery - just to look beautiful there you know - and - there was never anything so sordid as money ever mentioned - in fact I only ever touched money once and that was at the interval - as we went into the theatre one night - one gentleman I was with slid a five pound note a white 5 pound note - you know the old big white 5 pound notes and told me to get the drinks in the interval

so that it doesn't look as if I am paying for everything - and I stood at the bar and I got the drinks in for the group we were with - you know and that's the only time money was ever - I got presents - I never paid for anything - I was taken to beautiful places - went to I met people - I mean I met Harold Pinter on his first night of The Caretaker which wasn't at the Saville Row theatre it was at the Arts Club theatre it was there for a fortnight before it moved to the West End proper - we went backstage after I met Pinter which was a nice experience for me...'

Ian 31/5/05

Ian's involvement with this network lasted until he left the Navy and moved to live closer to his adopted family. His relationship with his adopted family had remained close and, as he comments, there was an explicit acknowledgement by his adopted sister of his sexuality:

'...when I was 23 which was 1953 - [I was] sat round the table with my family - all my family - my sister suddenly said to me - half way through - you won't get married will you our [Ian] - I said I'm not planning on it at the minute - she said well never mind you can always bring your boyfriends home - that was 1953 - I have never come out to my family - that was my outing...' (Ian 31/5/05)

At this time, Ian was still serving in the Navy and this event took place when he was home on leave. He goes on to comment that, whilst his sister had made this statement, there was an implicit acceptance of his sexuality by other members of his family who were also present at this gathering:

'...that was my adopted sister and that was in 1953 and there wasn't a battered¹² eyelid - I looked around the table and thought this was going to create some - our (adopted brother) was a - I would have said that he was homophobic till then cause of the things he used to say - see anybody walking down the street a bit - pansy - you know - he was full of gob but not a harmful hair on his head - not even a squeak out of him - not a word from anyone - I said oh thanks...and obviously the others thought the same - (a different adopted brother) was an evangelical lay preacher and he didn't even bat an eyelid or his wife - and it was never mentioned again and neither was my getting married or having a girlfriend - but I have taken several boyfriends home...'

(Ian 31/5/05)

Ian's sister goes beyond accepting his sexual identity and becomes complicit in his activities:

'...me and my sister developed a scheme whereby if I said that I was bringing a friend home - he shared my bedroom - if I were bringing a mate home he got the spare room - and we evolved that between us...'

(Ian 31/5/05)

On leaving the Navy he sought employment in an administrative capacity and has a further three jobs up to the point of his retirement. Given that he was a career service man, Ian was required to become a 'reservist' which meant that he stood the potential to be recalled into military service should the need arise. This had the consequence for Ian that he remained subject to military codes of conduct and

¹² This is the word that Ian used in his narrative.

could be dishonourably discharged which would affect his pension entitlement which was a very important consideration for him. During this period, Ian was living in the north of England, and despite the risk of being caught, he travelled to Manchester for sexual and social encounters with men. After his reservist status lapsed Ian 'came out' at work and joined the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. He met his first and only long term partner with whom he lived until 2005 when this relationship finished due to Ian's own age and the age differential between them. The issue of the age differential between Ian and his partner is explored in more detail in Chapter 8.

4.2.2 Robert

An only child, Robert was born in London in 1933 when his mother was twenty nine and his father sixty four. His father worked as a caretaker in the main church of a religious community. During the Second World War, Robert and his mother were evacuated from London to stay with people who were members of another church within this religious community; however, his mother was very unhappy about how she was treated there and returned to London with Robert where they continued to live throughout the war. A particular feature of Robert's memory of his childhood is the age of his father which he feels inhibited his relationship with him. His father died in 1953 after experiencing a long period of dementia when Robert was twenty, and his mother died in 1985 when he was fifty two. Robert undertook two years of national service in the Army from the age of twenty one, following an apprenticeship and training as an electrician.

He comments that his emerging and developing sexuality started in 1938 when he was five, with his memory of being held by his father who was barechested and he

describes liking the touch and feel of his father's skin. His first sexual encounter occurred when he was thirteen with a school friend and involved mutual masturbation which was repeated about a month later. He describes the first occasion in the following terms:

'Well - the first time I suppose I was about 13 I suppose - I don't know I really - I was attracted - I liked seeing pictures of men or males anyway partially undressed - something that was in my mind I never really thought about it in any sexual sense until I was 13 or 14 - um - then - I don't really remember how it actually happened - I had a school friend where I lived - um somehow the subject came up about sort of sex - and basically how to wank - up to then I thought it was only for peeing out of - (laugh) and um so yes we had mutual masturbation that was about all - and we took our trousers down and got our cocks out - I can't remember.'

(Robert 13/7/05)

He goes on to add:

'...but then I was beginning to realise I wanted rather more than that - what I meant was - I wanted them to be naked and I wanted to be naked - not kiss - a cuddle and fondle - and yes it never really happened - I remember there was another time when my parents had gone out for the evening - it was a summers evening and I went to find this guy - he wasn't in. I remember wandering around the area where he lived but I never found him - I didn't know where he was but - so that never happened - that was when I first realised that I was

attracted to boys or men.'

(Robert 13/7/05)

When asked how he understood what was happening to him, Robert observes that for him pleasure or enjoyment was a feature of this contact and that he quickly established the conditions for such activity which have continued through out his life:

'I enjoyed what we did together and he showed me what could happen and I wasn't experimenting on my own - I was with somebody else who was more experienced - certainly after that I did really want to be naked with somebody who was also naked - that is still a desire - even today when I am having sex I still like to be naked and I like the other person to be naked.'

(Robert 13/7/05)

Balanced against this sense of enjoyment or pleasure, Robert also reports that he has a clear sense that these activities should not be communicated to or be known by his parents and that they were, in fact, wrong:

'I suppose it was I thought that I shouldn't be doing - I think that's probably it - I can't consciously think about it - I didn't consciously think about it - I thought probably what I was doing was wrong - yes

(Robert 13/7/05)

Up to the age of twenty five he describes three further sexual contacts: the first two being with strangers in public places (on a bus and at the pavilion at Brighton)

and the third with a friend whilst on holiday on the Norfolk Broads. This latter contact is repeated whilst on the same holiday and afterwards, and it is in this story that he first describes himself as gay.

Robert comments that through this period:

'...when I first started work when I was 15 or 16 - I just assumed that - I was going to meet this girl and we would fall in love and we would get married and have 2.4 children - I just assumed that would happen and that would be my life - but I wasn't in the slightest bit attracted sexually or in any other way to women - so as some of my colleagues were going out picking up birds - I wasn't - I wasn't picking up men either - I wasn't doing anything.'

(Robert 13/7/05)

Robert's two year period in the Army did not involve any same sex contact and he describes only two instances that were of a sexual nature, the first was whilst taking a shower:

'I never made any effort to have sex with other guys - I do remember - it wasn't a sexual thing - I was at Gosport actually in an old naval barracks and I went to have a shower - the showers were in a separate block which was in the middle of the - there were buildings around - it was an old Victorian building which didn't have showers - I remember it being a turn on - I think I was probably the only one in the place - but I stripped off sort of in public.'

(Robert 13/7/05)

The second incident took place whilst in the barracks:

'we were in barracks - the only other sexual thing I can remember in the army - it wasn't really that either - I remember once we were all getting ready for bed... there was another guy the other side of the barrack room who was getting ready for bed and he did strip off completely - I only saw his back view but I thought that was quite a turn on not that I did anything about it - I was aware but not thinking about it.'

(Robert 13/7/05)

There is an inherent contradiction in Robert's narrative as he described this part of his life because, whilst he engages in sexual contact with men which included a twenty year relationship with a colleague at work which was characterised by opportunistic and casual sexual contacts, he referred to himself as being celibate during this part of his life. This reference to celibacy or lack of interest in sexual activity was a consistent theme for him that lasts until his mother's death. Robert refers to the death of his mother as a 'watershed' in terms of his sexuality:

'...after she died I felt that I had to build a new life really - um - I realised probably not - subconsciously well - my life now will be much more gay orientated - though it wasn't a conscious decision it must have been something that I just realised ...before that I didn't have much of a sex life - I certainly have a more active one now It was a watershed - really - from there ... my life changed - I was free to do what I wanted to do - which was to be with men - principally with gay men - whether it was for sex or not...'

As an only child, his mother's death was also very significant for him and within weeks Robert, who owned a canal boat, had placed an advert in a waterways magazine asking for male travelling companions. He is quite clear in his narrative that he needed to rebuild his life and this would be within the context of being a gay man. The advert generated a number of replies and through these relationships he began to be linked into various other networks, primarily gay nudist groups whose meetings invariably became group sex or orgies. Through personal introductions he continued to be included in other networks; however, these began to fold as the organisers either died or decided that they could no longer be bothered with the organisation of these events. As these informal networks began to break up, he joined more formalised groups such as the Gay Nudist Group. These groups however tended to be organised on a different basis to Robert's expectations as they included a clear no touch policy. Through these groups he met other men and maintained sexual relationships however, he did not, much to his regret, establish a longer term relationship and this remains the pattern of his life at the present time. He continues to participate in these networks and describes himself as promiscuous, although he is not comfortable with the implications of that word.

4.2.3 Rachel

Rachel was born in a large city in the north west of England in 1937 and was the first of two children. Her younger brother was six weeks old and she was four when her parents split up. Her father had another family in the south of England which was the cause of the separation and divorce. When Rachel was seven, her

mother legally changed their last name to the man's name with whom she was in a relationship. However, this relationship did not last any length of time as Rachel's mother found out that her partner was seeing another woman. When she was twelve, her mother married a man that Rachel adored and continues to hold in great esteem.

Rachel left school at sixteen and was employed in various local manufacturing companies as either an administrator or on the factory floor. During this period her mother played an important role in her life which included directing what employment she should take:

'mi mum was one of them - you had to move if the money was better so she would scout out the jobs and I'd be told that I had to go to them.'

(Rachel 24/9/07)

She married when she was twenty and in the following years she had two children, a daughter and then a son. Her daughter died when she was ten which was very traumatic for Rachel, particularly as her daughter was living away from her at the time. Rachel describes having to get away from her mother and move into her own home and, in order to do so, she had to get married:

'I got married when I was 20 - 1958 and I wouldn't have dared leave home - she wouldn't have let me - no I would have dared say I wanted me own place - although I did - dream of me own place until I thought mi only escape from this is to get married.'

(Rachel 24/9/07)

However, marriage did not make Rachel happy and having two children equally did not resolve an unhappiness that she attributes to 'stirrings' which were about her attraction to women. Rachel recognised that she had these feelings before she got married:

'well I learnt that I wanted to be a lesbian when I was about eighteen - even before I got married but it was not spoken about - oh god it wasn't talked about - you thought you were a nut case - I did think I was a nut case for having feelings and I thought oh god what's wrong with me - I definitely thought - well bordering on an illness.'

(Rachel 24/9/07)

She discussed this attraction and her unhappiness with her husband who encouraged her to have sex with a female friend and she describes these events in the following terms:

'I thought I was going mad - and because I am getting feelings for another woman - oh you are alright you are only going through a phase he said - I thought it was only a phase what a relief because I didn't know anyone who knew anything - so I said to him how do you know I will get over it - he said you will so I didn't get over it - and he said to me one night - I had a friend who used to - so one night I was drunk - crying about these - I am going mad I don't know what's the matter with me - I don't want to be put into a home - I thought I was going to be locked up - so he said look you are getting yourself worked up - in a state - so he said there is a woman downstairs - go downstairs and sort yourself out - I thought what does he mean - so I thought I'll go

down anyway - do not dare me - so halfway down the stairs I thought what am I going to do when I get there I don't know - so I went down and went into the living room and got in with her and everything came natural so I had sex with her and next thing I know - time has run away with us - she said I was shocked - I didn't know whether to pretend to be asleep or what - but she said I am glad that I responded - oh I am as well - she said I know where proper lesbians go - so I said why are we lesbians - she said well that's what they do and I went - oh what a relief - and so we went to town then and found the real ones.'

(Rachel 24/9/07)

Having spent the night with her friend, she realised that being with a woman was what she wanted and began a long term relationship with this friend whilst continuing her relationship with her husband. In time she decided to leave her husband although she recognised that she needed money in order to set up a new home for herself, her children and her partner. This began a long career as a prostitute with a regular clientele of men as she quickly evolved into sadomasochistic practices which, as she states, avoids all the 'messy stuff'. Although having left her husband after seven years of marriage, she did not divorce him for another four years primarily because she liked him and didn't want to hurt him further. At the divorce hearing she was given custody of the children when she told the judge that her husband had encouraged her to have sex with a woman. In describing the divorce Rachel observes:

'He divorced me on the grounds that I had run off with a lesbian - I was the talk of the neighbourhood - talk of the wash house - but he was very good actually - he didn't divorce me for about three years...well my

god I had to do the act of me life in court - it was against the law for a lesbian to have children - to have custody - they didn't give it to you - and I thought I cant have this - so the judge in court for the divorce - you had to be in court - you couldn't not be - you were summoned and you had to go and you had to stand in the dock and answer the - the accusations - he was divorcing me for irretrievable breakdown - and the judge said to me have you tried at this marriage Mrs [name] - I said I have your honour so I said... I have but I couldn't fight it - the pull was too strong - did you not think that by having these assignments that your husband would not be hurt - but he said I could - when I said that the judge glowered at him - and I said he told me to in the first place and the judge said is that right Mr [name] - well he did didn't he - and its not my fault that when I got there I found that was what I was and so I won it... and I got custody and that was very unknown.'

(Rachel 30/9/07)

Rachel's relationship with her friend lasted a number of years and was, she says, very turbulent. In the period following the break-up of this relationship, Rachel had a number of other relationships with women. Throughout all of these relationships she maintained her career as a 'madam' with her regular clientele, and as she describes, she was very good at it. Her work was carried out with the full knowledge of her female partners and accepting this arrangement became a condition for a relationship with her.

Rachel became chronically ill relatively early in life, having experienced but not recognising a heart attack whilst waiting for one of her clients. Her health settled

for a short period but significantly worsened and dependence became a feature of the rest of her life.

4.2.4 Steven

Born in an industrial town in the north of England in 1938, Steven was also an only child. His mother and father were very religious acting as lay preachers in a non-conformist church, a role that he adopted in his teenage years and continued for most of his life. Whilst his father entered military service in 1941 when Steven was three, his mother remained at home to look after him. He moved to a local secondary school at the age of eleven and left when he was nineteen.

In terms of his sexuality, Steven recognises that from about four he was attracted to 'attractive' men, most notably a friend of his father. Steven describes his behaviour around this man as being shy and in awe of him, which was a reaction that he didn't have with women:

'I don't know what it was - there were times when I was confronted by a particularly nice looking guy when I felt uneasy, excited, embarrassed and unworthy - unworthy to be in the company of such a lovely guy - if a good looking guy was showing interest in me I ran off - ran off mentally not necessarily physically - I went very shy in the company of attractive men [they were] older guys - I remember a friend of my father's who at the time wasn't married and would occasionally visit here - and my father - they would go out together occasionally but I do remember this guy - he was a good looking young man.'

(Steven 17/8/06)

Steven became sexually active at about the age of ten with boys who lived in the neighbourhood. He recalls playing games which involved the boys taking their clothes off as part of their play. Whilst play was the primary focus, sexual encounters did occur. However, as Steven grew older, this emphasis changed as 'play' became for him a cover for sexual activity:

'there were one or two lads in the avenue who I occasionally had a fumble with and there were about six lads of my age a bit younger or a bit older and then when I was in my early to mid teens it was quite normal for us to spend summer like we have just had in swimming trunks and pumps or trainers as we call them now - pumps and just wear - that is all we would have on - swimming trunks we would have on here crossing the road at the bottom and playing in the wood - swallows and amazons sort of stuff I suppose it was I think it was quite - you would never do that now - you would be in a pair of shorts - briefs - but not swimming trunks - and of course if it suited us we would then spend the time running around naked taken our swimming trunks off playing around and climbing trees - stick our swimming trunks somewhere and then we would be nude running around. I mean it wouldn't go on for hours - it would just be five or ten minutes - see who dares sort of thing and once I was climbing a tree and the lads took my swimming trunks off and played with me and we did it to others - if you were up a tree that was alright but not on all the time - it was an interlude in generally whatever else we were doing - making a den - getting conkers or whatever it was.'

(Steven 17/8/06)

There is again a clear sense within Steven's narrative that adults were not part of this play and, in fact, that adults were not to know about their activities:

'better kept out of it rather than not allowed into it because you never knew what sort of fire and brimstone was going to be unleashed on to you.'

(Steven 17/8/06)

These contacts carried on until such time as he and his friends moved into different secondary schools. The fragmentation of these relationships was exacerbated as Steven became more involved in the church which meant that he was not available to play with his friends. A new school presented Steven with new opportunities as he became involved with other boys in same sex masturbatory activity. He also describes himself being a bit 'fluttery' about two of the boys:

'there were lots of us - when I got to the 5th year - 4th year then the 5th form - I was beginning to have regular wank buddies I suppose - for a better term and then when I was in the 6th form there were one or two lads who occasionally got together - one lad particularly when I went swimming - we had our own swimming pool - the school did and there was one lad he always insisted in changing in the next cubicle to me but the cubicles were just curtains you just draw the front curtains and that went on til I was nineteen - not every lad was up for it but it was known those lads who were up for a fumble with each other.'

(Steven 17/8/06)

Through his late teenage years and early twenties Steven presented himself in two ways in which he both engaged with other men for sexual contact on an episodic and opportunistic basis whilst pursuing the requirements for a career. The pursuit of a career presented an image of him as being 'too busy' or 'too distracted' to engage in relationships with women.

He undertook national service for two years and reports having sexual contact with other men whilst in the Army. The structures of military service acted to both severely punish same sex activity and also constructed an environment in which such activity could easily take place. The environment was such that he was aware of same sex activity taking place, commenting:

'there were one or two occasions gathered under the grape vine - some of the rooms occupied by corporals there was room for two or three in - occasionally the corporal would install a bloke - so you'd ask where is so-and-so gone well he was in corporal so-in-so's room wasn't he sort of thing but I had a bit of a sex life in the army.'

(Steven 17/8/06)

Upon discharge he undertook professional training and moved into his chosen profession achieving considerable success until the 1970s when he 'came out' at work after which his career faltered. Steven was an early member of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) and became the local contact for this organisation. He also became an early member of gay Christian groups and campaigned for senior members of the clergy to recognise and accept gay men and lesbians within the church. Given Steven's political and campaigning activities related to gay rights, it was inevitable that, in spite of the professional

consequences, he would come out at work because maintaining such a duality would have been, as he describes, morally very difficult for him.

He 'came out' during a discussion within the staff group about crime and he was arguing that the police, in order to achieve their targets, focus their efforts on easy successes in particular 'cottageing'. During this discussion a number of derogatory comments were being made about gay men, with one of his colleagues stating that he didn't know any gay men. Steven commented 'yes you do, me'. The immediate two years following that statement were very difficult for him as his manager actively sought to dismiss him. A senior manager became involved in this situation and Steven felt that he was offered a great deal of protection by this man for the remaining period of his employment.

Although Steven had moved out of the family home he remained in the same town and in regular contact with his mother and father. Steven reports that being single was not unusual within his family structure:

'...but I do come from a family where it is quite respectable to be single and not get married - my father had two sisters and neither of them married..'

(Steven 17/8/06)

Steven also comments in an earlier interview:

'...and I remember once some woman asking my mother about me getting married and have I got a girlfriend - by this time I had left home - I was

working... in [name of a town] and um it was reported to back to me our [Steven] is not going to get married so can that be the end of it.'
(Steven 27/6/06)

His interpretation of this comment was that she was aware of his sexuality but that this was an issue that they never discussed. He further reports that his mother acknowledged that she and her husband were never going to be grandparents:

'... I am the only one and she did say - the nearest we ever got to talking about it - so you are not going to get married then and your father so does love children - we are not going to have any grandchildren then and I said oh well I can arrange that for you if you like and she replied - and you a ... local preacher.'
(Steven 27/6/06)

Whilst Steven was dealing with the consequences of his public announcement, his relationship with his parents had evolved into a 'don't-ask-don't tell' arrangement which is how it remained until their deaths.

4.2.5 Janice

Janice was born in 1943 in a large city in the south west of England. At birth she was placed in care and lived in a children's home until she was placed with a foster family in 1956 at thirteen years old. Janice's father was a black American soldier in the United Kingdom during the Second World War and it was during this time that he met her white mother. As a mixed race child, Janice believes that she

was placed in the orphanage at birth because her skin colour was darker than was socially acceptable at that time.

Janice remembers being taken from the children's home on a long journey and then put in a room with a woman that she did not know. After some time, the person who had taken her to this place came into the room and told her that the woman was her mother. She recalls that there was no physical contact with this woman during this event and that through the rest of her childhood, this was the only contact she had with her mother.

Janice was placed with a white foster family in another city some distance from where she was born. She recounts that, during this time she, became aware that she was black when she was looking in the mirror one morning. This was a shock for her because, prior to this, she had not recognised that she was any different to other children:

'I wasn't aware of looking different when I was in the children's home growing up but when I got fostered I suppose I was about fourteen - you know I would get called blackie and nigger and that sort of thing all the way through mi life growing up but because I didn't understand what it meant - it was just a horrible word that you said to someone - and I only mean horrible in the way that it would have a negative effect on you and so if someone called me blackie I would call them blackie back or call them nigger back because I didn't know what it meant - but when I got fostered - I was about 14 - I can remember just one day waking up in the morning as usual and going to the bathroom and having a wash and stuff and looking in the mirror and staring at mi

self and suddenly seeing a - its like a self awareness - and seeing a black face looking back at me to the point of thinking whose that and thinking its me - I am looking at a mirror on the wall - and it was the first time that I was aware that I looked a different colour - so it was a bit of a - not a disappointment but it was alarming to me because - I am fourteen I am learning about life from other people in school and subjects at school - it was alarming because all of a sudden I am going to have to take this on board - I look different because I am a different colour and I remember running around to mi friend and straight away saying I am black I am black why didn't you tell me - they were like I don't care what colour you are you can be red white and blue with pink spots for all I care - and just mi best friend saying that back to me sort of settled me down on it a little bit...'

(Janice 22/6/07)

She joined the armed forces as soon as she could because doing so meant that she could leave her foster family and be discharged from local authority care. Whilst in the services she developed a number of very close emotional and sometimes sexual relationships with the other women:

'I was in the WRENS I was attracted to women and I would sleep with women - a lot of the time sex never happened - it was closeness that I needed or I found myself wanting with women - and I think these - that society had influenced me to not go beyond - going into anything sexual on account of what was said generally in the media about it...'

(Janice 22/6/07)

Despite these contacts with other women, Janice married in 1962, aged nineteen, to a man who was also in the armed forces. Janice explains the reasons why she got married in the following manner:

'....cause I look back now and think how come I got into that situation feeling the way I did towards women and not to men - that was because he was the first person who ever claimed that he loved me - no one had ever told - so when that happened it was like one of the novels that I would read from a magazine called True Romance and then men and women getting together and being love and getting married and living happily ever after - and so just those three little words - I love you - sent bells going off in mi head and mi knees knocking and like this is it - and I was married within three months of him saying that...'

(Janice 22/6/07)

Janice had two girls with him. However, over time, she became increasingly unhappy with their life together and he told her that other people believed that she was a lesbian. This reference was a revelation for her, as she comments:

'...when I was married for a few years - mi husband said that when he first saw me - and told his mate that he fancied me and his mate said - this was in the WRENS - and his mate said you have no chance with her she is a lesbian - and when he told me this story it was a bit like all kinds images and feeling and words that I had heard throughout mi life saying that - I got to be like a straight woman and get married and have kids and all them things sort of slot out of position and something

else slotted into position because it made me aware of - yes I am a lesbian - that's what it is that's going on with me - that's what it is that's going on with me for most of me life... so it was like someone who is hungry getting fed for the first time with nourishment that they have needed for so long - so - apart from it being an emotional fix for me it was something on a deeper level - like a spiritual fix.'

(Janice 22/6/07)

This ascription by others of her perceived sexuality was a revelation to Janice and, upon her husband's discharge from the armed services, the family moved to his home city in the north of England where Janice started work in a city centre pub which was known at that time as a gay and lesbian venue. In this environment, Janice says that she became more aware of her own sexuality and enjoyed the company of the gay men and the lesbians that she met there:

'...the first night when I went to work there I saw this collection of people in a certain area of the pub and just looking at them - looking over to them I was aware of how different they were to all the other people who were drinking in the pub and I mean different in the way of their actions how they spoke just general sort of - it was like a feeling for me I cant really describe - a feeling of well being and liking what I was seeing, hearing and feeling from them and it just made me think I am like them and I still wasn't like fully informed about what it meant about being different, being gay being a lesbian - but I was really aware of how good it felt and I found mi self talking to them a lot when they came to the bar and it would be general chit chat and they be dead funny back and there was a couple of men who would be in

partial drag - you know the odd one that had a bit of make up on and which you could only just see - they weren't totally obvious of what their difference was and how they felt about themselves and how they were - but on a personal level talking you would pick that up from them and I really loved working there because I felt like I could relate to someone I was similar to like...'

(Janice 22/6/07)

Increasingly unhappy in her marriage, Janice separated from her husband and began to divorce him. The divorce proceedings focused on Janice's attraction to women in general and not on any particular relationship that she was having. The divorce settlement resulted in custody of her children being given to her husband with Janice having rights of access. However, shortly after the divorce, her husband and her children moved some two hundred miles away to another city. This inevitably had the result that her contact with her children was very limited and she feels that they grew up not knowing her.

The pivotal event for her was falling in love when she was fifty which she describes as being a set of emotions that she had never ever felt before, despite a number of relationships including her marriage. Having fallen so intensely in love, Janice claimed that this gave her the strength to re-examine other parts of her life in particular those parts that had hurt her.

4.2.6 Gail

Born in 1945, in a market town in the West Midlands of England, Gail is the second of five children. She has an older sister and three younger brothers. Both

of her parents worked in manual occupations with her father employed constructing the new (at the time) motorways and working away from home for long periods whilst her mother worked in the local factories.

Gail describes her childhood as being idyllic, growing up in a rural environment and being able to play freely in the countryside with an extended and warm family nearby. These memories are punctuated with periods of fear associated with the return home of her father who was regularly drunk and prone to outbursts of violence. She maintains that her father never physically beat her mother up but he would throw items of furniture around the house whilst Gail remained in bed frightened about what was happening to her mother. During this time, Gail describes the family's finances as being very tight because her father kept most of his earnings for himself and this forced her mother to work.

Gail's mother and maternal grandmother were very prominent in her life and she describes always knowing that she was intensely loved and wanted by both of these women. She attributes them with instilling in her an acute sense of justice and injustice and, in particular, an understanding of the position of women in society. Gail left school at fifteen and began work in a variety of different settings in the local town. At eighteen, in 1963, she married a man seven years older than herself and was, at the time, pregnant. In the seven years following her marriage, she had four pregnancies and gave birth to three children: two girls and a boy.

In 1983 when Gail was thirty eight, her husband took a job in the north west of England which meant a move and a splitting of her family as the oldest children stayed in the market town. This move and the separation from her family were difficult for Gail and she admits that her relationship with her husband was not

good and they came to live separate lives. Gail began to engage in the activities of the town and within months she had met a woman to whom she became increasingly attracted. Gail sought every opportunity to spend time in this woman's company and the relationship quickly developed into flirting with lots of innuendo and Gail's wish that they would eventually kiss:

'yes and I really really liked her and I just flirted with her like mad and she kissed me one day and that was it...I knew I was flirting with her and I was aware that I was doing that but I wasn't aware that I particularly wanted her to kiss me or do anything more about it - and I am not saying this with hindsight but yes - that very definitely was what I wanted to happen and she was talking about getting her hair done one day...I am quite good at doing hair and I can do my own very well...and she had not been able to get in and get her hair done and I said I will blow dry it for you - and I was blow drying her hair and I got the brush tangled in it and she said to me - are you getting caught up or tangled up or something like that - and I went oh yes definitely - because I knew that wasn't what she meant and I knew she knew what I meant.'

(Gail 19/3/07)

She describes the feeling of being kissed by this woman as like nothing she had felt before, knowing immediately that this was who she is:

'I just come out of the loo and was washing my hands and we were stood there just talking and I knew she was going to kiss me and she knew I wanted her to - she probably picked up on the signs much better than I did - probably much more aware and yes it was - it was'

so enlightening it was unbelievable that this light went on and everything was explainable and different really...'

(Gail 19/3/07)

Gail comments that she was very comfortable with the events that followed, making references of the 'naturalness' for her of being with another woman:

'I didn't find it to be a problem and I think that something that people don't understand - they think you are going to agonise about it like - this cant be me and all of that sort of stuff - but I never worried about it and I never dwelt on it and I never thought oh god am I going to sleep with her or not - I don't think I thought about - I think I just accepted that that was going to happen - the first time we made love [name] said to me are you sure that you have never slept with a woman before because you knew what to do and I said that I didn't think that was particularly hard (laughing) but for some women that you can talk to they have been scared and don't know what to do - and been very unsure about it - that - it was never an issue - I didn't agonise about it - I didn't think I can't be gay I'm going to sleep with a woman what's that going to be like - I just knew it was going to happen and it was going to be okay and I was just convinced about it.'

(Gail 19/3/07)

The consequences of this event for Gail were many-layered, as she separated from her husband who reacted violently towards her. This meant leaving the family home, a dramatic decrease in her income and all the emotional events associated with separation and divorce. Members of her family became involved as her

youngest daughter started bed-wetting, her eldest daughter, who had remained in the Midlands moved in with her and the community in which she lived became antagonistic towards her supporting her husband. At the same time she was happy and in love. Gail reports having knowledge of same sex relationships through her adolescence and that included her 'crush' on a girl of the same age. Gail also recalls events surrounding a social group that she had become involved with:

'...we met this guy and he had a party at his house and we met a group of people there and there was this woman in it – her name was [name] – we used to do things like go out for a meal or go to the theatre – quite a group of us who played on this – 4 or 5 – who played on this crib team and it wasn't something that [husbands name] was involved in or anything and I think [name] fancied me but I don't think at that time I recognised that or she probably wasn't brave enough – if she had been a bit braver then it might have.'

(Gail19/3/07)

For Gail, relationships are very important and, in many respects, the passage of her life is measured in terms of her relationships. The act of 'coming out' was extremely significant, not only in terms of her own sense of self, but also in terms of the effect this had on those who were closest to her. Gail's disclosure of her sexuality had varying impacts on these different relationships: thus, for her children she says there were different reactions, much of which reflects their age and level of understanding at the time. She comments that the most significant impact was felt by her youngest child who was in her teens and who was living with her. Gail's mother, who was very important to her, was unable to accept her

sexuality, with the result that, whilst Gail remained close to her mother, she was never able to discuss her relationships which were not acknowledged by her mother. Gail believed, that if she had left her husband to be with a man, then her mother would have been very supportive of her. As Gail's life settled following her 'coming out', she undertook a professional training course at a local university, moved into employment in that profession and is approaching retirement from a senior position in a local authority.

4.3 Conclusion

The stories that have been told in this chapter are those stories that were identified by each of the older lesbians and gay men as significant in terms of their understanding of their sense of self in their earlier lives. The stories have focused on their sexual selves as 'other' and how they came to both name and know the substance of that difference. Each of the older lesbians and gay men were actively engaged in a process of self-making and negotiating their own expression of this difference. The result is that they are all very clear that they are lesbian or gay and that each of them has established their own sense of what this difference means in their own lives.

Whilst these stories relate to the individual process of self-making as each of the older lesbians and gay men make sense of themselves and their difference, it is also clear that this self-making was not entirely an isolating and isolated experience. Ian's stories clearly indicate that his sister was actively complicit in his sexual activities and he also gave examples of members of other families sanctioning their relatives same sex activities. We must remember that the

activities that were being positively sanctioned by the other family members were, at the time, illegal.

Whilst Ian provides us with examples of direct engagement of other people in his process of self-making, all the other participants in my research comment in their stories that other people were also involved at different levels in the making of their sexual selves. Rachel's husband was urging her to go downstairs that night to have sex with her female friend. Whilst Gail had fallen in love with another woman who was a lesbian, this significantly disrupted the trajectory of Gail's life as she was plunged into poverty and homelessness all of which impacted on her children and other family relationships. She recounts how important her mother was in her life and, whilst this relationship continued, she also states that she was never able to talk to her mother about her relationships with women. The changed nature of her relationship with her mother and the effect that leaving her husband for another woman had on her children suggests that for Gail being a lesbian was an extremely important factor in her understanding of herself. Both Robert and Steven report that, whilst neither of them engaged in conversation with their respective family members about their sexuality, Steven suggests that he felt that his mother was aware that he was gay and neither of them report being put under any pressure to marry and thereby conform to the stereotypical arrangements.

The stories that were told by Ian also included his school and neighbourhood friends and his perception that, in engaging in same sex activity with them, he was a source of pleasure for them. By the time he was fourteen, Ian comments that he was actively seeking out other people in order to engage in same sex activity and we may infer from this that the issue of pleasure is a consistent feature as he both gives and receives pleasure through having sex with other men. Ian was visiting

the 'cottages' for sex in the town that he was brought up in 1944, he was fourteen and these were the last years of the war (although he would not have been aware of this), his activities, of which he was aware, were criminal offences. His stories of this period of his life would indicate that he had developed a sense of himself as gay, that he was fully aware of what this meant, and that he was receiving pleasure from both the act of sex with men and the circumstances in which the act took place.

Janice's stories also include her awareness of her 'otherness' based upon her skin colour and that this also involved other people and, in particular, a friend to whom she ran in a distressed state having looked in the mirror and for the first time recognised herself. Her stories involved her increasing awareness of what it meant to her to be black and lesbian, initially in the 1960s. Whilst she was engaged in a process of self-making and exploring these racial and sexual selves, she was also a mother who had lost custody of her children because the courts had determined that because she was a lesbian she was not a fit person to look after her children.

These stories clearly indicate that in different ways their family and friends and other lesbians and gay men were involved in this self-making with the result that we need to locate this process of the making of self within a dialogic context (which will be developed further in Chapter 9). This context acknowledges the presence and influence of other people and the tensions that are involved as a result of their presence and influence. However, the involvement of other people in a dialogic context is very different to the models of sexual identity formation outlined in Chapter 2, in which not only were the presence of others required but these others needed to be heterosexual in order to affirm the achievement of being lesbian or gay. Dialogism merely facilitates the acknowledgement of others

in the making of self and gives no indication of the extent, primacy or significance of that presence.

The following chapter explores the stories told to me by the older lesbians and gay men about their experiences of being older people. Their stories again clearly indicate that they continue to be engaged in the processes of self-making and negotiating the meaning of self. Their stories clearly contradict the more commonly understood image of later life which suggests that this is a period of consolidation and reflection, with little or no emphasis on personal growth.

Chapter 5 - Voices 2: Being older

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the stories told by the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research about their experiences and understanding of what it means to be an older person. These stories are about the present and the recent past which is a reflection of the time in their lives when the interviews took place. They are also about their hopes and anticipation for the future.

The terms 'ageing' and 'growing older' conceptualise ageing as a dynamic process which, in turn, facilitates an understanding of how an individual is situated vis-à-vis other people. These terms therefore have a relational component rather than alternative terms such as 'the elderly' which refer to fixed demographic categories. Ageing and growing older also make reference to biological processes; however, the point at which human beings begin to age is contested, although arguably ageing could be said to begin at birth. These terms also contain a chronological component which is measured through the passage of time.

Being older is also a social construct through which we receive and understand the experience of the self as older based on constructed stereotypical images. Our engagement with the stereotypes of later life is very complex as we both generalise what it means to be older people and apply these to individuals about whom we then make judgements on the basis of whether they are old and how they are old. These stereotypes are part of our lexicon of ageing. We also reject, subvert, transgress and resist them, whilst at the same time we transmit them. It is through these stereotypical images that our younger selves learn what it means to

be old and, on this basis, we perceive and understand ourselves and what it means to be old, more often than not concluding that we are not older people or, at least, not old as they are old. Stereotypical images of older people present a pastiche of what being old means based upon attributes that attract negative ascription that are the antithesis of what is deemed good, attractive and desired - namely the attributes associated with being young.

In a contradiction to my overall approach and beliefs about growing older, I have employed in this chapter the conventional form of distinguishing between later life and earlier adulthood: that of retirement which represents, in popular usage, the entry point into old age and is perceived to be a life transition. The employment of this construct reflects how the older lesbians and gay men themselves employed it as a device to focus their understanding of what being old meant for them as their starting point was when they retired. However, Gail had not retired when the interviews took place and, whilst she was still in full-time employment, her perception of herself was that she was both approaching this life transition and that, if her financial position had been different, then she would have already retired. The common perception of retirement is that it symbolises a synergy between chronological age and access to various age-related milestones such as the 'old age pension', free bus passes and reduced prices for a range of services. The reality is much more complex than this perception conveys in that people retire at different chronological ages and for different reasons. However, the perception that retirement is a watershed life event and is a transition into the later part of life persists.

Throughout all the different parts of this research, I have not established a universal age at which later life starts. Instead, I have relied on the individual older

lesbians and gay men's own constructions of when this transition in their lives occurred as the basis for discussing their feelings and reactions to being an older person.

5.2 The voices

In a similar manner to the preceding chapter, the voices that are presented in this chapter are individual narratives and are formed of free flowing speech. The voices are also presented in chronological order of their birth with the date references being the date of the relevant interview.

5.2.1 Ian

Retiring from full-time employment in 1990 when he was sixty years old on the grounds of ill health, he comments that there may have been an alternative influence for him: *'it is something that I prepared for - I always said - I was a bit of an equalitist - if women can retire at 60 then I was going to retire at 60 and I planned for it.'* (Ian 6/7/05). The idea that retirement is a significant dislocation or life event is part of Ian's experience of growing older. In his narrative there are two further references that convey the impact and effect of retiring:

'...if you plan for retirement then you plan for and you know what you are expecting - it is not a shock - I can imagine people who suddenly retire it must be a hell of a shock to suddenly find that I am not going to work tomorrow - I won't see all those people at work - what will I do with my day - shock - with a capital SH and a K at the end of it...'

(Ian 6/7/05)

In reference to the impact of retirement on a specific individual, he goes on to say:

'the guy that I took over from - my last job - he was looking forward to retirement - no plans - till he retired and found that he was under his wife's feet - he was forever coming down to the office to say hello - he had two daughters in Canada - and he planned to go when there was cheap flight - he didn't have to fix it with other people - and 18 months after he retired he died - well I decided that this was not happening to me in the first place.'

(Ian 6/7/05)

There are two significant and interrelated influences on his views of ageing and growing older. The first is that Ian has lived a very healthy life and remains very healthy in later life. The second is his perception of himself, particularly as a younger man, as very attractive and desirable. This imagery has influenced how he describes the ageing process in which he employs the analogy of looking after a car:

'...what a lot it depends upon is how you treat older life - is a lot of it is how you started off - taking for an example - you buy a new car - if you don't look after it and service it - in 20 years time - it is going to be a wreck - the same with you - you start off with a young fit body and if you don't look after it - depending on how badly you don't look after it - the sooner you are going to be a wreck - if you look after your body you won't become that wreck - then you don't feel as old and ancient as you probably look.'

(Ian 6/7/05)

In describing his philosophical approach to ageing, Ian feels that it is important to maintain an approach or attitude that is both 'young at heart' whilst affirming and celebrating the experience of life that comes with advancing years:

'...I don't know whether I have mentioned this before but my philosophy is that age is a state of mind - I know some very old 30 year olds and some very young 80 year olds - age - old age middle age - whatever - isn't the number of years that you have lived it is the number of years experience that you have got - age - middle age old age - the age bit is a misnomer it's not I have lived for 75 years - I have 75 years experience - as I say when people ask me how old are you - I say I am 35 with 75 years.' experience.'

(Ian 6/7/05)

He does feel that he has had to adapt and change his behaviour and activities as he has grown older:

'...but as I say - as far as I am concerned - um - is adapting your life you think you can still do what you could 40 years ago you can't - well not so often anyway - (laughing) - you have to spread yourself around more thinly (laughing) occupy yourself with other things - but I have been lucky have had plenty of things to occupy myself with.'

(Ian 6/7/05)

The physical effects of ageing are acknowledged by Ian as significant and this is focused primarily on a diminution of his sexual performance which has affected his long term relationship:

'...as I say when one is 30 and one's 50 - not much - when one is 50 and the other is 70 - it is slightly different - to be quite blunt the 50 year old is ready for it twice a night the 70 year old - I won't say - I'm joking when I say once a fortnight - your body doesn't reproduce the activities as well as when you were 50 - the situation I am in I have nobody else to blame but myself - because when I was 68 - 7 years ago I realised that [partner's name] wasn't as happy - sex wise - love making wise as what we were - and I knew what the problem was - he is an every night and sometimes twice a night - you know and I always was - I was just finding it a bit - it didn't work as well - I would perform - I would make love to him - but I didn't always go the full route if you know what I mean and he noticed and he said you are not getting satisfied - I said [partner's name] I am thoroughly satisfied - the physical me can't keep up with the mental me - I said I am not reproducing - getting any stimulation.'

(Ian 6/7/05)

He goes on to comment:

'...cause I knew several people my age who had given up ten years before I did on the same thing - no time for it - couldn't be bothered - I have met people on the gay scene - my age - never had since they were 55 - weren't interested after that...'

(Ian 6/7/05)

Initially, this issue of sexual activity was responded to by the introduction of a mutually agreed third man who would be someone that Ian liked and could have a non-sexual relationship with whilst enabling his partner to have a sexual relationship. This arrangement was agreed to as an attempt to save their relationship and also had a number of benefits for Ian:

'I felt as though I was doing the right thing - I was - to me - if it had worked - I felt that I was getting my cake and eating it at the same time - it was a little bit selfish what I was doing - cause I knew - that if I hadn't done what I did then - and acted in the way that I did then - what would have happened is what has happened now - I think that might have happened a lot sooner ...as I said I didn't want a nursing home - if there's two of them it might not have that effect later in life - purely - in a lot of ways it was purely selfish - it wasn't just looking after [partner's name] it was looking after my later life.'

(Ian 6/7/05)

However, this arrangement broke down leaving Ian on his own as the relationship between his ex-partner and the other man continued. Ian moved out of the home that he and his partner had made together and re-established himself as a single man. Whilst this arrangement was about Ian's resolution to the physiological changes that accompanied his ageing, he is also quick to assert that he remains sexually active and further comments that many of his friends have long since given up sexual activity. In this latter comment, Ian is asserting an association between the construct of masculinity and sexual prowess and that, because he is still physiologically able to engage in sexual activity, he remains a 'man'. In this story, Ian is articulating a tension between different forces which have arisen

because of the effects of ageing on his physiology. Thus he is acknowledging that he is no longer able to perform sexually at the rate that his partner wishes and the impact that this had on his long term relationship whilst trying to find a way to resolve these problems in order to save his relationship. In negotiating this tension, he is also asserting his masculinity within the context of the interview by maintaining that he was still able to be sexually active. Within a hierarchy of masculinities in which gay men are acknowledged as men but not real men, the physiological effects of ageing potentially add an additional layer to these constructs through which ageing erodes the sense of self as both a man and a gay man.

Ian demonstrates that he has thought about other issues related to growing older and with, this, the stereotypical image of being old, that of dependency.

Commenting that he does not want to be in a residential care home:

'...the only one thing I always said and I used to say to [partner's name] - don't ever put me in an old peoples home - I said I don't like it - I used to pass on the bus on the way to work at 7 o'clock in the morning and they were sat in their chairs waiting for their breakfasts - why the hell do they get them up at 7 o'clock in the morning - why couldn't they let them have a lie in - that was one of the things I looked forward to when I retired - I didn't have to get up at the set routine - and I used to say to [name] don't you ever put me in a nursing home - I have always said that and I will not go into one.'

(Ian 6/7/05)

He also states that, if he ever needs hospital care, he does not mind the health care staff being told about his sexuality but that he wants to be treated equally and that he has no preference in respect of the gender of the people caring for him:

'...if I get the same standard of treatment I don't care who gives it me - whether it is social services people or whoever - I would have no bother about going to hospital - no problem - whether it is male nurse who is doing something to you or a female nurse - I don't give a damn - they are doing a job - I am a product on their production line type thing - I am quite happy with that situation - if there were any problems - if I felt I was being treated different cause of my sexuality then I would be anti - but I have never had and I don't expect it.'

(Ian 6/7/05)

Ian is currently a volunteer with his local Age Concern organisation and, in this capacity, he has a focus on issues related to older lesbians and gay men, acting as a link between individuals and organisations such as housing departments and associations. He also spends time with gay youth groups talking about his experiences and his life, as he feels that younger gay men are not aware of what it was like growing up prior to 1967 and have little knowledge of lesbian and gay history. As a consequence, they are unaware of the personal struggles that have taken place in order to gain the current levels of acceptance for lesbian and gay issues.

5.2.2 Robert

Robert retired from employment in 1991 at the age of fifty eight after thirty five years of working with the same employer. Retirement as a dislocation in the life course was not an issue for Robert. His employer had changed working patterns and moved into split shifts which he was not happy about and retiring from work became the desired option for him. This decision was made easier for him because his income remained reasonable given that he had contributed to his employer's final salary pension scheme. Whilst he was happy to leave work, he does have a consistent and real worry as he ages, given that both his father and mother experienced through different disease processes, dementia in their later lives (his father experienced Alzheimer's disease and his mother vascular dementia). His concern is that he may also experience a dementia.

When asked what effect ageing has had on him, his response also involves an acknowledgement of a diminution of his physical strength which, in turn, is linked to his sexual performance:

'...well the obvious thing of growing older is the obvious thing of diminishing physical capability - I don't have the strength that I had when I was younger - I think as a gay man it probably produces a feeling of regret - if I was 20 years younger or 30 years younger - I would have a much better sex life than I have now - although my sex life is not momentous - but that applies to everybody not just gay people - as you get older - you regret that there are things that you no longer can do - yes I think that is it really.'

(Robert 31/10/05)

In general terms, Robert was quite accepting of his own ageing and his situation:

'I accept the situation that I am in - I am a gay man in his 70s and - I am a gay man in his 70s - I accept my life as it is - I don't have regrets - I wish I was beautiful or something - I am a realist I suppose...I try to have as young an outlook on life as I can - but that doesn't mean that I know all the latest pop music because I don't - but I try not to be set in the 70s or set in my ways - I couldn't do that because I am 70 now and 70 year old men don't do that - but no I try and be as young in my outlook as I can - I don't think it matters to people how old I am - only possibly if there was a possibility of a sexual relationship - but from that point of view I have met a number of guys quite a bit younger than I am.'

(Robert 31/10/05)

In his comment about maintaining a young outlook on life, Robert is articulating a distinction that is commonly drawn between younger and older people which, in turn, is based upon contrasting images. Thus, an old person's outlook is perceived as rigid, outdated and slow, all of which are negative ascriptions whilst, in contrast, a young outlook is thought to be positive. The association with youth and youthful attributes is perceived to be even more important in later life, inferring the personal rejection of ageing and keeping the self young means vibrancy, quickness of thought and health, all of which are more socially desirable.

Reviewing his narrative on ageing, the single dominant theme is sex and sexual activity. When asked if, as a result of the physiological effects of ageing a gay older man is no longer able to undertake sexual activity, would this make him less of a man or less gay his response involves a very subtle use of language. Thus,

he acknowledges that he would remain gay but does not link this state with gender. However, in the same sentence he does associate sexuality and gender when he refers to continuing to enjoy the company of gay men with an implicit assumption that such men are sexually able. Robert's use of language would suggest that, for him, the physiological inability to engage in sexual activity does have an effect on his perception of self as a man:

'...if it got to the stage that I couldn't physically achieve an erection or couldn't come - I would still be gay and I would still enjoy that and I would still want to be with gay men and even if I was unable to do very much.'

(Robert 31/10/05)

For Robert, being a gay man helped him to 'adjust' to later life primarily because, for him, being gay meant having to be both emotionally and physically independent throughout the whole of his life course. Being gay and an easier adjustment to growing older is articulated by many of the researchers and commentators identified in chapter 2 (see Weinberg and Williams 1974, Minnigerode 1976, Kelly 1977, Goleman Wolf 1982, Lee 1987, Pope and Schulz 1990, D'Augelli 1994 and Kooden 1997). The association between independence and adjustment to later life is based on a number of powerful assumptions, including that being an older person requires adjustment and that the exclusion and oppression that older lesbians and gay men have experienced has in some way been good for the soul because it has induced the required and desired state of independence. Reflecting his own life experiences, Robert believes that there is a difference between the current cohort of older lesbians and gay men and younger lesbians and gay men which will mean that they will be less independent

because the current social environment has meant that they have not had to be able to look after themselves in the same manner as he had to:

'...whether it is just me but I don't know - but yes I do - well gay men - gay people - I think it makes it easier - I think because - admittedly I have not been in a relationship I have always been independent - I think being gay - being independent - being part of a minority - having to stand up for self it does make you more of an independent person therefore find being older easier - I think ... I do think that they [younger lesbians and gay men] have it much more on a plate now - I think we had to fight for things - we had to be careful - we were leading double life really - I think we have developed those life skills - maybe that is what I mean by independence - I am not so certain - that a 20 year old now when they get to 70 are going to be so independent - I suppose we did develop those life skills - whether they will develop in the same way.'

(Robert 31/10/05)

Robert's opinion, based upon his own experience, is that the development of the life skills which have enabled him to be independent through his life have emerged out of being a single man. However, there is a complex interaction between Robert's status as a single man and how he has both constructed his sexuality and lived his life as a gay man. Whilst Robert has sought and enjoyed multiple sexual contacts, it is only in the latter part of his life that he has desired a longer term relationship:

'I think being single you have to rely on yourself a lot - you haven't got a partner to look after you - you haven't got a wife or a husband as a married

couple would have and I would guess that in sort of thing responsibilities are divided but if you are single you don't have that so I think that you to be able to look after yourself - so I don't know whether there is any real difference between being a single person and a single gay - I think possibly that gays are a bit more independent mainly because - they have had to be - they have not been part of the norm - being married and 2.4 children and the Ford Escort on the drive which you clean every Sunday morning - sort of thing - so I think that gay men are better off than single men.'

(Robert 31/10/05)

In this narrative Robert, as an older man, regrets that when the interviews took place he was not in a relationship. The absence of a relationship evokes other issues for him as both his mother and father experienced dementia in later life and he is very aware of the risk that he will also develop a dementia. A long term relationship for Robert represents the potential that, should he develop dementia, he would not be alone and would be cared for by his partner as he believes that such a relationship would also be associated with both companionship and care. Outside of his concern about dementia, Robert also feels that a long term relationship would make it easier for him in social contexts than being on his own and that it would be nice to have someone with whom he was in an intimate relationship with to share things. Robert does qualify his desire to be in a relationship by adding this would need to be with a younger man.

'I think you can love another man - perhaps a younger man even though physically you are not capable of having sex - I think younger men can love older men - which surprises me really - well it is probably - again coming back to the physical side of sex - I always felt - although I know it is not true

now that a younger man would not be interested in me sexually - but I know that is not true - possibly because I felt that ideally I did want to have sex with a younger man - that is the other side of the coin - I wanted to have sex with them would they want to have sex with me - and I found now that doesn't seem to matter now - age - in that respect - it is and is not a barrier - which I felt that it might be but it seems that it isn't.'

(Robert 31/10/05)

When asked about the future, he comments with a smile on his face that if he does need care then he would like to be looked after in a gay environment and by a nice young gay man:

'well I don't know - I intend carrying on as I am - and hopefully meeting other gay guys - having sex and if eventually my health deteriorates or my brain goes then I suppose I shall end up in an older peoples home of some sort and that will be it - it is not a prospect that I find at all inviting but if physically I am no longer able to look after myself then I suppose I would have to.'

(Robert 31/10/05)

In spite of his worries about the prospect of dementia becoming a feature of his life, Robert remains very well. He has a strong network of friends whom he meets on a regular basis, engages in his canal boating activities and is a volunteer for an adult literacy group. The major focus in his life from which he derives a great deal of pleasure remains the group sex activities that he continues to attend and host.

5.2.3 Rachel

Rachel, throughout her younger adult life, generated income as a sado-masochistic prostitute. As her health started to deteriorate following her heart attack which occurred when she was in her fifties, she was increasingly unable to work. Today her health is extremely poor as her heart has continued to weaken and she has developed other chronic illnesses. She is now very dependent on formal carers whom she views as both intrusive and necessary. The intrusion that they represent for her is strongly related to her sexuality as she describes herself as a very private person and has had to return to the 'closet' for fear of their reaction to her as a lesbian. Rachel's view of getting older is very negative and is strongly associated with her failing physical health:

'Getting older for me unfortunately - I have not had a very nice - not what I would have expected - my health is absolutely crap and I am time and time again being told that there is nothing that they can do - no more medication can be given because I am on the maximum's and so really come home and get your - well in actual fact when I had me heart op it was told to go home and put me affairs in order - that was their exact words - and he was really sorry and I believed that he was really sorry.... on a scale of 1 to 10 I am about a 3.'

(Rachel 7/10/07)

When the interviews took place Rachel was seventy. As a younger person, she did not think that she would live to seventy as her family came from 'short lived stock' and at seventy she had already lived longer than any of her relatives. As she has aged, she has experienced a reduced libido which was associated with her failing

health. This has affected her relationship with her new girlfriend as the extract shows:

'...I thought I am getting old and I need to be selfish to look after me self and me relationship was going wrong and I didn't have the strength to fight for that and fight for me self so I had to give up - you know to make me self to be able to be selfish and look after me self and not care about anybody because when I am with somebody I care a lot and - anyway I made a wrong decision.'

(Rachel 30/9/07)

For Rachel, her experience of being dependent through physical illness has not been very good. She hates being dependent on other people for personal care as she perceived such dependence as an assault on her sense of self:

'I don't like it - it hurts me - it bloody hurts me - because I have gone through all that shit in the beginning to out myself to end up putting myself back in the closet because these carers go and chit chat amongst each other I don't want them going chit chatting about me - oh that woman I go to is a lesbian - I don't want that - I am not ashamed about what I am but I am not there to liven their day up.'

(Rachel 30/9/07)

After a heart operation, Rachel required support with intimate care and she found being naked in the presence of the female carers embarrassing and what was worse for her was having to:

'... strip off and be washed by these people and I felt like a piece of meat - lift your arm up - when I first came out of hospital I was very fragile and I couldn't move and I had to learn to walk and talk and feed myself again so I was a bit wobbly - so it was lift your arm up and they would give it a half hearted wipe not doing all the nooks and crannies and I used to say to them will you make sure that you do me nooks and crannies cause I am fastidiously clean me - I don't do much about glamour but I am fastidious - and they would say oh you are alright - you have not been anywhere - that to me was unacceptable but I had to accept what they gave me - and it was really upsetting - I used to cry when they had gone - it was really upsetting and I have to it dawned on me - so I thought I am going to have to get used to these buggers and make the most of it.'

(Rachel 21/10/07)

Rachel is clearly unhappy about these care arrangements and that, given she has to contribute to the cost of care, she feels that she does not get either value for money or a quality service. She describes the reaction of the carers to her comments about this disparity as being bullying and she feels frightened about their reaction or potential reaction to her as a lesbian:

'...if you dared say you have not been doing what you should have done - oh they made it awkward for you - tantamount to bullying I would say like - one carer left me in tears saying that I am given a task and I come here and I do that task and when I have done it whether it be 1 hour - which they were allowed or ten minutes and I vamoose - well I was paying for her for an hour and she was being with me ten minutes and it upset me so - that is what I think of carers.'

(Rachel 21/10/07)

Despite these experiences, Rachel wants to be able to trust the carers, to develop a relationship with them, for them to listen to her rather than continually complain about their own lives. Rachel has been so unhappy with her circumstances that she resorts to harming herself by picking at her skin and creating sores:

'I started sort of self harming when I realised that I needed all this help and that I was trapped - that is how I look at - I am trapped in this situation - there is no way for me other than a one-on-one personal assistant or au pair - that I would have a continuity with and that I could build up a trust - god that would be wonderful - but when I say self harming I didn't cut me self - I picked - and consequently I have scarred me self and I cant get undressed in front of people because of it...that's my fault that I have done this to myself I have done that - and it has took me two years to come to terms and I am only now recognising it and admitting it and I am having counselling for it - but it was all to do with the embarrassment and fear of these people coming into my domain and I am there vulnerable.'

(Rachel 21/10/07)

On the subject of residential care, Rachel has two opinions which are dependent upon her cognitive ability should such care be required. If unaware of her surroundings, then she is not bothered where her care is offered. However, if she does have an awareness of her surroundings, she would emphatically reject residential care as an option for her, maintaining that she would have nothing in common with the other residents.

'oh no – over my dead body - I know but it is unthinkable for me - for the simple reason is that I would have nothing in common - and I would be in this place with all these old fogies of which I had become one as well - with nothing to talk about - I don't want to hear about what their Jack's had for his tea and how many teeth the grandchild has got - I am not interested and sitting knitting in the corner - oh no I don't think so.'

(Rachel 21/10/07)

This rejection of institutional forms of care is based on Rachel's experience in hospital where she felt isolated, withdrawn and very unhappy. She believed that, if such arrangements were required for her, she felt that she would, in fact, die fairly quickly because as far as she was concerned there was nothing to live for. When asked about her feelings about care provided within a lesbian context, her response shifts because she believes that lesbian based care provision would be more:

' understand[ing] about shyness - or want of a better word - who you expose yourself to - we are pretty private people and we don't go to anyone and throw it all off - so I would feel more able to build some sort of trust up.'

(Rachel 21/10/07)

She was very enthusiastic about residential care for lesbians with the care provided by lesbians and expressed a wish to move to such an arrangement immediately:

'...fine - we could all arrange activities - we would I hope - because I would - push somebody who could walk - chat to people - and be able to ...'

*chat - because I love talking - you have probably worked that out by now
(laughing).'*

(Rachel 21/10/07)

The support that she is dependent on has implications for her as she has decided not to identify herself as a lesbian to her carers as she claims she does not want to become the object of their gossip. She asserts, that in previous encounters, she has been the subject of the ageist stereotype which denies the sexuality of older people and ascribes asexuality. As she describes it – she was viewed simply as an old woman. In general, ageing and being an older person for Rachel has been profoundly linked to her poor health and the care that she has received has not been a positive experience for her. She now describes herself in the following terms:

'...afraid I would say – afraid – I am all the things that I thought I would never be like – I have never denied what I am and I would never deny it now if I was asked a question are you gay I would say yes but I don't feel that these workers have got the bleeding where with all to – I give up and I think it is bloody unfair.'

(Rachel 30/9/07)

Rachel's experience of being an older person is strongly influenced by the nature of her long term health condition which, in turn, has ensured that she is very dependent on other people. The extent of her dependence has a very significant impact on her sense of self in many expressions of that self. Dependence is the very opposite of how she lived her life prior to her heart attack and is in direct contradiction to the Western conceptual constructs of self which give primacy to

independence and autonomy. Much of the tension that exists between her very real state of dependence and the importance that is placed on independence and autonomy in the construction of self is played out in respect of how she expresses her sexual self. In the extract above, Rachel is negotiating this tension where she wants to be open about her sexuality whilst equally expressing no confidence in how carers would respond to her as a lesbian. Given her dependence, Rachel's resolution to this tension is pragmatic in that, whilst she would not deny that she is a lesbian, she also does not feel able to freely express her sexuality.

5.2.4 Steven

Steven took early retirement in 1992 at the age of fifty four which he feels was a consequence of his employer's negative reaction to his sexuality. In the period between coming out at work and retiring, Steven maintains that his employer placed him in an increasingly difficult situation as he was given the most arduous jobs and tasks thereby making his life very difficult. He felt that he was forced to leave his chosen profession in which he was very good and much respected. Steven, in acknowledging that his last years in work were very bad, draws on comments made by the senior manager who was supportive of him:

'...you are a survivor - you have had to be a survivor - you fought for your rights and now those of us who admire you and folks like you - you are a survivor [Steven] and you have had to be and sadly in your job...survivors get given the shit because they survive which isn't fair - he said sadly you are known to be a survivor... and that has happened I know - to you in the past and it will always happen because you happen to be a survivor and you - and apart from your nature - the fact that you have had to fight your

corner because you are a gay man is part of that survival package.'

(Steven 4/9/06)

In this extract, Steven is placing considerable emphasis on other people's perceptions of him but also on his own perception of himself as someone who can survive very difficult circumstances. Undoubtedly, the basis upon which this sense of self as survivor is derived rests within his employer's very hostile reaction to him after stating the nature of his sexuality. Steven's sense of himself as a survivor is also reflected in his story of retirement in which he acknowledges that leaving work was very difficult for him but that, in time, he survived by becoming involved in other activities:

'Well it was early retirement I was in my mid 50s you see - and I thought I will never get another job - but I now realise that I could have but I was so drained and exhausted eventually - I was rather excited by the idea of not having to go to work anymore but what was I going to do...and I eventually came through that by carrying on and doing work and of course I - it then gave me the opportunity to get involved with [place name] Buddies and that provides its own intellectual challenge helping to run or be part of a strategy for an HIV charity is challenging as we are employers as well so we are not just having to deal with HIV and those issues with the clients.'

(Steven 4/9/06)

When asked what getting older has meant to him, Steven situated his response in terms of relationships and, in particular, the absence of an intimate relationship. Steven's association of growing older with an intimate relationship reflects the

comments made by Robert in that such a relationship would provide both companionship and care:

'...in my state at the present moment - no partner - nobody to look after me but of course the partner could be my age or much younger and needing me but there is the loneliness that might come from aloneness that might come when you are isolated as you get older anyway - but that happens to married people doesn't it - like my father - there was a certain amount of loneliness element in his last few years because of his demographic isolation.'

(Steven 4/9/06)

Steven acknowledges that he has been reflecting on what would happen to him as he gets older and, in this reflection, he draws interesting gender and age distinctions as he feels that in terms of gender women are more sociable with each other than men. Steven was sixty eight when he made the statement below and is referring to being old as an experience that has yet to happen to him:

'...it always exercised my mind what was going to happen to me when I get old...I think it is a general concern it might be uppermost in our minds but in terms of gay men and gay women I think - in some ways women have it better - not easier but better... I get the feeling women more easily congregate with each other than men do - gay or straight - as we get older I mean - I certainly know that.'

(Steven 4/9/06)

Steven believes that he carries with him into later life his experiences as a gay man which, in association with being an only child, have helped to prepare him for later life. He feels that self reliance, independence, keeping active and an inherent gay style are what characterise his current position. However, in the extract below, he places more emphasis on being an only child as the primary source of his independence:

'I think I am self resourceful as well - cause as an only child there is nobody else to play with unless you go out into the street and engage with the neighbours children who you may not want to so if you have a family - brothers and sisters there are play mates on tap aren't there if you come from a family but if you happen to a loner in a family of 12 and you want to be alone and you are happy playing on your own and because you are like that and your siblings are nicking your toys all the time you are reduced to having to invent with a shoe box and a Fairy Liquid bottle.'

(Steven 4/9/06)

Steven is very clear about what may compromise his sense of self in later life – namely dependence. As a single gay man, he feels that, in the absence of a relationship, he maintains an incremental approach to any support he may need which is based on the extent of his dependence. His preference, should he need support, is to be cared for by his friends and, in particular, one friend with whom he has a sexual relationship:

'...but I am quite happy - see this friend of mine the young man he suggested that he became my carer - he suggested that he came and lived here when you need or when you get like your father I move in as your

carer - now I had no problem with that you see - if he was my carer looking after my physical needs – wiping me bum and all that business - I have no problem with that because I don't think that would - the relationship I have with him as a person anyway as it developed wouldn't compromise my resourcefulness - I think compromising people's self esteem and resourcefulness - if we are going down that route - is when these intimacies have to be performed by professional strangers - do you understand what I mean by that - and I suspect that they are not compromised if they are done by close friends who you have an intimate - not necessarily a physical intimate - but a mental, emotional spiritual intimacy because we can have - in some ways there is an intimacy between you and I which isn't physical because of the professional development that has gone on...'

(Steven 4/9/06)

Outside of this arrangement he becomes concerned about the conditions of a care environment, namely who is undertaking these tasks and their attitude towards him as a gay man:

'As a gay man the other issue of course is that these intimacies performed by professional strangers who assume you are heterosexual - or whose professional behaviour conditions them to be assuming that you are heterosexual and ignoring your gay things - all these intimacies - I would not be particularly comfortable with women performing intimacies on my body - not while I am conscious.'

(Steven 4/9/06)

He is very clear that formal care, either at home or in an institutional setting, comes imbued with heteronormative assumptions which will affect his care and impact on his sexuality. These assumptions, he feels, present a potentially significant challenge to his gay self and he is clear that, not only should care be provided without such assumptions, but also that care providers should celebrate his sexuality.

'...and still in spite of Age Concern and other organisations taking onboard the gay concept if I am in an old folks home or if I go to the old age pensioners drop-in it will be heterosexually organised such organizations are rampant with heterosexism in terms of the staff and what they want you to do and what they expect you to do - you know if two old guys want to go and be together the average forty year old woman who chooses to fucking staff these bloody places can't bloody think etc (laughing) and that sometimes concerns me but I have enough gay friends my age and younger and a lot younger who are - who will have a regard for me when I am getting older.'

(Steven 4/9/06)

Within Steven's narrative we can clearly see how he was negotiating what it meant to him to be an older person. He is both associating and dissociating himself with being an older person and is viewing old age as a state of dependence which, for him presents a fundamental challenge to his sense of self. In projecting his life forward, Steven is also negotiating how a state of dependence would be acceptable to him and, in doing so, he draws a clear distinction about who is caring for him. If such care is situated within formal care arrangements, Steven is establishing clear conditions upon which this would be acceptable to him and

these are located within the gender of the people who care for him and their acknowledgement of his sexuality. If, however, his care is provided informally by his friends, he offers no conditions and, in particular no conditions about the gender of his friends who might undertake these tasks. In 2007, Steven collapsed at home and was admitted to hospital where he died after a short illness. He died in a formal care setting but with his lesbian and gay friends around him as he wished.

5.2.5 Janice

Retiring from the organised labour market when she was sixty in 2003 Janice was approaching her sixty fourth birthday when the interview took place and she was asked what this birthday meant to her:

'...um (singing) 'when I get older losing my hair' (laughing) that is the first thing it means to me - that number and traditionally how the age represented - a stereotype image to me that meant once you were over sixty - you spent most of your life watching tele or - well you didn't have a life in respect of going out and about to places or to work or anything like that - I really don't know how to explain it what it means- well to me what it meant is not being able to use all your skills and attributes that you have got so it meant you were literally shutting down you got turned down kind of thing - a stage - physically mentally emotionally and everything and this is what it used to mean to me or that is how I see it still with a lot of people toda.'

(Janice 22/7/09)

In the extract above, Janice is drawing upon a number of negative images of later life which include physical changes to appearance, levels of passivity and lack of activity and no longer employing skills and attributes. The image that Janice is portraying of later life is one of disengagement after the withdrawal from the formal labour market which is in turn supported by a number of social gerontological theories that are outlined in Chapter 9. However, the negative image of growing older that is portrayed by Janice is balanced against a more positive and reflective account of being an older person:

'Since the millennium there is loads of changes going on - like the number now is more of an inconvenience to me now - when I use it - even though I still have me age up front - at personal levels or in society as far as - like meeting new people who I want to work with or - be involved in some respect - it's an inconvenience because 64 sounds like an auld woman and you know and on paper I can't imagine how people think of me whereas - you know in reality I feel dead fit - well I am dead fit and I feel it as well - in a general sense and especially because of me age...me age isn't an issue where - where my emotions are concerned - because I don't think that love has an age - love doesn't have any boundaries any way - so I feel great being sixty three because of - and in spite of all the experiences that I have had it has got me to where I am now and how I feel now and as far as the future and where I am going now...because being sixty three has made me really aware that - I have got much less future than I have past and its like - you know that one where you say you sort out the wheat from chaff - its that kind of thing - I want to be amongst people who are moving forward in their lives and who - I can benefit and who can benefit me - it's a dual thing - so because I am sixty three - when I try and think about the future I think about

it in very much the same way in which I have always lived me life - which a lot of the time is making it up as I go along obviously there is some things that you do have to put into your life kind of thing - responsibilities and all of that one but I mean as far as what I do in a way to please miself you know I always make sure that I am going to get pleasure from something I do like...'

(Janice 22/7/09)

However, despite these references to her age and getting older, Janice also engages in a process of apparently denying her age:

'Well I have been saying lately that I am going to knock twenty years off now in certain situations because - and I am - why - first - because this is a decision that I have thought about changing - because sometimes I am getting ag[gravation] through it - you know - I am a bit like the court jester or some people you know - some people - friends - casual friends - tell them how old you are - just from the word go - if it comes up in conversation and we are talking about age and me age comes out then and its sound - but some people introduce me by here [saying] guess how old she is - you know - it makes me feel a bit like a freak because you know that's put up in front of anything else about me you know ... and like I was saying before I don't want to keep putting miself up for this - so I am counteracting it - these people are alright who are doing it - and I don't think that they mean to be horrible to me or anything - it just that thing like - I want to be known for something other than I look younger than the amount of time that I have lived on earth - so apart from dealing with society - I am think of an age to suit the external part of me - in my mind - where I am in me body and how

I feel and the things that I am doing - thinking about me past - rather than thinking about what I'd represent today with how I feel and what I am doing.'

(Janice 22/7/09)

She notes that there are a number of benefits and disadvantages to growing older. The benefits she identifies are confidence and experience which are both drawn from a life lived. Consequently, Janice feels that she is much more able to articulate what she wants and the conditions that are acceptable to her. In providing an example of this, Janice talks about continuing to engage with her interests which she has made something of a business from:

'Yes I do want to make more money I do want more in that sense but what ever more I get I want to enjoy getting it you know - I like to enjoy when I have got it - that's inevitable - but I want to enjoy it - like different work that I do now or get ask to do - I choose now what I know I am going to get a buzz from doing anyway - so I am not just doing it for the money I am in it to get what I want to feel from it - and you know I have worked in places where I hadn't enjoyed it or liked it apart from you know learning about meself and what I really do want to do in me life cause its always easier - so I am more selective - I won't say fussy - I am more selective in what I am doing first and foremost when I got the choice and other than you know I'll take what comes - what come to me more - I don't go out so much to go and find things that I want - cause I am quite content and happy where I'm at and what I have got but I still want more I'm only content because I have achieved it - I have achieved getting to where I am in me life and I am made up I am - I am made up of all the people I have known and the

experiences cause has brought me here as well.'

(Janice 22/7/09)

Her confidence and experience, she feels, enable her to mix with much younger people, in particular, young black men and, on this basis, she feels that they help to keep her young in attitude:

'I can hang out with - the other day I was in me mate's son's house - who is - I think about twenty six and while I am there having a chat with him and this young man of twenty eight - I have seen him growing up from a little toddler and he's got a brother who came into the flat and another young man from a mate of mine and these are like sixteen, eighteen, twenty, twenty one year olds and I sit there for two hours and we all have a gab and a chat about different things and it is great and I love it and these are young black and mixed race males at this particular time - whose company I was in and I love it because I had loads of information that I could give them for where they are at in their lives and how they feel about what they are doing and all that one and at the same time they could feed me with loads of information about loads of fun that they have had and fun about where they'd been and things like that and I loved to have been there with them and I know I'd have had the same laughs they had with them and these straight young men who know I'm a lesbian.'

(Janice 22/7/09)

However, the disadvantages of growing older for her are a stronger influence and are primarily associated with the image of being older. She goes to great lengths

to draw a distinction between herself and other older people whose attitude she maintains is very different from her own, as she comments:

'... because when I was talking about being over 60 - traditionally what the stereotype was - if I had just gone along with the flow of society - I'd be walking around with a Tesco bag for life all crinkled and raggedy because I have had for life and a zimmer may be - a zimmer frame - and I am not like that because I had made sure that I was alright and being alright to me was about have a choice to live a full life you know and I think if you go with the flow of society you become a stereotype of how the media represents that age bracket which what we are on about now.'

(Janice 22/7/09)

In talking about the future, Janice draws a distinction between her own ageing future and that of other older people and that this distinction is based upon attitude to life and the lack of conformity to the stereotypical images of older people. In this respect, her reference to keeping young and mixing with younger people is also associated with her feelings of physical wellbeing and that she is a free spirit which, in turn, is the sum of her experiences.

5.2.6 Gail

Gail, at the age of sixty two, is the only one of the participants in my research who was still in full-time employment when the interview took place. The issue of her own retirement is very real to her, as she acknowledges that she is rapidly approaching the age of compulsory retirement and if she could have afforded it she would have retired some time ago:

' I can't afford to retire - if I work till I am sixty five - I will have sixteen years and 1 month - whatever - in the... pension scheme - if I retire before then I would obviously be looking at a reduced pension - so if I retired now instead of three years time - that will cost me £3000 per year - in my pension - so that is a lot of money - but also I am at the top of my salary - we [Gail lives with her youngest daughter] are comfortably off - we have never been as well off as we are now.'

(Gail 30/4/07)

Gail's evaluation of being an older person is undertaken in relation to other people – initially with her children and their advancing chronological ages but - there is also an acknowledgement that, as time has passed, her position in the wider family has changed as she is now the oldest in the extended family:

'...whereas I used to have all this family - all these people on the family tree above us - they have really all gone now - it just feels that all these people should be here still - and it is not depressing or anything but it is a loss - you know it is all those aunts uncles and cousins who were important.'

(Gail 30/4/07)

For Gail, there are advantages in being older in that she feels that she is less concerned about how people feel and react towards her with the result that she will state her opinion in stark terms with little regard to the consequences. She describes herself employing the image of a cantankerous old woman. Whilst she states that getting older has not been an issue for her, she does acknowledge that

she experiences a loss of energy, not feeling well and, in particular, not being able to do what she used to do.

'...there is something that makes me feel I am sixty two really - probably the fact that the stairs at work are even worse than the stairs here - and there will be days when I will walk from the car park and my hips and knees ache and there are other days that I can walk for miles and it is not a problem - it's about the body wearing out really and I think the other thing is about the future and what happens to you in old age and that gets to be nearer and nearer - it is not something that you think that is ages away and it probably is and you get more aware of that....if I could afford I think I would retire now - because I don't want to make the effort to get up and go to work - when I am there I am fine but the last couple of years I don't want to go...'

(Gail 30/4/07)

The association between growing older and physical decline is continued by Gail as she reflects on what will happen when she can't drive and where she is best placed to maintain her independence whilst receiving support when she needs it:

'...but if it came to retirement because I wouldn't have a very big pension - but that pension would put me above getting any help with housing costs - so the alternative is that you buy a house and you retire without any housing costs - it is enormously convenient - my doctor's is just the other side of that main road - you have got all the shops around here - you have got the off- licence - you have got restaurants you have got everything on your doorstep - so come the day that I can't drive everything is on your

doorstep - you know having poor mobility - and that is something that people have to plan for - it is no good waiting till you can't get up the stairs - you can't keep this house any longer - you need to do it before you get to that point – you need to downsize before you get there.'

(Gail 30/4/07)

As an older lesbian, she views the prospect of institutional care with foreboding which is primarily situated in the absence of shared experiences – what would she talk about and how others would view her at a time of dependence:

'...but you talk about it and sometimes - with other gay women - what is going to happen if you go into an old people's home - you need one just for gay women - you need one that runs a minibus service that goes to [name] disco... on a Friday night or something - and not that I go there anymore or anywhere else - but how do you fit into that environment - where you are very likely to be the only one - so who is going to understand what your past is about and what matters to you - and that - it all ties in with coming out because it is not the fact that you come out and it is all done with - that is an ongoing thing - with every new person and every new situation in your life...so the possibility of living in a care home... is not a good outlook for gay women and probably not for gay men either - for all of us in that way.'

(Gail 30/4/07)

In this context, she does raise the issue of not being in a relationship and sees this as affording the opportunity of an emotional connection forged over time:

'I think that is what everybody wants - everybody wants somebody there -

somebody special for them - comfortableness with somebody and that huge trust that you have with somebody in a long term relationship but I have not been in a relationship for a long time - but that could all change tomorrow - somebody could walk in the door that could turn my stomach over - you don't know... I don't particularly want to live with somebody else - it is too much independence to give up.'

(Gail30/4/07)

In a broader reflection on issues of age and ageing, Gail highlights the importance of recognising the individual experiences of a person's past and their lived experiences which, in turn, form the basis of our identities:

'I would think the issues about age are probably no different for a gay woman or a straight woman other than - a total failure to recognise your sexuality and the importance of your past - even if it is not now - but I think that happens to old people anyway - nobody recognises the importance of the past but I suppose the possible ultimate thing of being in care or being in an old people's home and being the only gay woman - that is quite a daunting prospect that is - because one of the things that is important really isn't it - is remembering things and talking about - do you remember when - and that is part of how our memories work isn't it.'

(Gail 30/4/07)

In her narrative, Gail is also negotiating the meaning of what growing older means to her as she acknowledges that ageing does not bother her, whilst responding to the physical changes that are occurring to her as a result of growing older. Gail's financial position, which has informed her decision not to retire from full-time

employment, is, in part, a reflection of her earlier life and her access to employment based superannuation schemes which is a feature in the lives of all the women who participated in my research. This is unlike the position of the men who were able to make extensive contributions to such schemes and were able to draw on good pension arrangements.

5.3 Conclusion

The stories that have been told in this chapter are about being an older person and what this means to the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research. Unlike the previous chapter, the stories relate to what they felt about being an older person in the recent past, how they feel about being older in the here-and-now and what they feel the future may hold for them as they continue to age.

There are similarities and also differences between these stories. In terms of similarities, all of the older lesbians and gay men were single when the interviews were taking place and each expressed a regret that they were not in a long term relationship which would have afforded them companionship and the prospect of care from a loved one. Each of the voices are engaged in their own process of self-making as older lesbians and gay men and, in doing, so are negotiating what it means to be an old lesbian or gay man. In their narratives they are articulating negative perceptions of what it means to be an older person based on both their experiences of physiological changes to their bodies and also in terms of changes in status and reaction to them as an older person. They are also projecting their own positive experiences about being older people and reflecting on what growing older has brought for them. However, when projecting into their futures and what

may lie ahead of them, the negativity presents a universal image of a protracted decline and decay. In contradiction to this general image, Steven was very active prior to his collapse at home and subsequent admission into hospital and death and this prospect does not feature in the general imagery of later life.

Based on a clear sense of themselves as lesbians or gay men, all the participants reject the perceived standard service responses to older people who have high levels of dependence. They argue that they have little in common with other older people in such circumstances, given that their life experiences have been so different and therefore do not wish to share a common care environment.

There are clear life course differences between them which, in turn, construct differences in each person's understanding of what it means to be an older person. All the older lesbians have children and whilst each of the women have very different relationships with their children, the fact that they have children means that they do not project themselves as being without a family which is the experience of the older gay men who have no close family members. Associated with these life course differences is their financial position which was clearly articulated by Gail.

In the chapters which are part of the following section, the points of synergy and difference that have emerged from the thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews will be explored in detail. These three chapters will present evidence to indicate that, as individuals, each of them are very clear about their understanding of their sense of self in terms of being lesbian or gay and that this sense of self rejected, and acted in defiance of, the dominance of hegemonic heteronormativity. These six individuals, clearly rejected the dominant expression of sexuality, which

in the early part of their life courses had very real consequences with very high costs for them.

The outcome of the thematic analysis illustrates how they have engaged in processes of self-making and of negotiating what it means for them to be lesbians and gay men. This process of negotiation and self-making continues to find expression in their lives as they engage with the making of their older lesbian and gay selves and this is in contradiction to the stereotypical images of later life which view this part of the life course as a period of no further growth. In their individual negotiations and construction of their older selves, they are negotiating the tensions that are involved in the differences between lived experiences of being an older person and the received imagery of what later life should be. In this tension there exists the dominant hegemonic process of ageism which sets expectations and makes judgements of all older people. Ageism is not a new expression of hegemony given that it has been a presence throughout their individual life courses; however, their relationship with ageism will have changed as they have aged and become older people.

Section 3 - Stories of stories

This section of this thesis is about understanding and making sense of the stories that have been told to me by the older lesbians and gay men. The voices and the stories that are heard in this section are derived from the thematic analysis of the narratives. I have sought not to overuse particular stories: however, there are some stories or aspects of stories that were told by the older lesbians and gay men that are pivotal in their lives and are significant in understanding the sense that they have made of themselves. Plummer (1995) identifies such stories as our '*best stories*' and are such because of the insight that they provide for us.

Throughout this section we will see how the older lesbians and gay men engaged and continue to engage in processes of self-making and negotiating their sense of self, both when they were younger and now as older people.

This section contains four chapters, three of which are themes that have emerged from the analysis whilst the final chapter situates these themes within a broader theoretical framework. The first chapter (Chapter 6) is organised around the theme of the 'self as different'. The narratives of the older lesbians and gay men identify how they made sense of themselves as 'other' both in terms of the recognition of their sexual difference and also in terms of how that definition impacted on their lives and continues to influence how they see themselves as older people. The chapter reflects these issues in two themes: the first is the claim to naturalness and the second is resistance and separation.

The second chapter (Chapter 7) picks up another theme from the narratives which is related to the self as political in which I specifically focus on how they made

sense of their gendered selves and the influences that their sexual selves had on their understandings of what it means to be men and women and gay men and lesbians. The chapter begins with an acknowledgement and analysis of the intersection of other expressions of self and how these have contributed to the making and meaning of the self and then moves on to explore the social constructions of femininity and masculinity and how these constructs are made manifest in their lives.

The third chapter (Chapter 8) explores their stories about their ageing selves and what growing older and being an older person means to them. This involves exploring their negative and positive expressions of ageing as well as how they are managing themselves as older people.

The final chapter explores the theoretical constructs that afford us the opportunity to begin to understand these stories identifying both the dominant social gerontological theories and constructs of self, rejecting these on the basis that they are either too rigid, that the assumptive base perpetuates the pejorative construction of older people, or that they are unable to reflect the contradictions and tensions associated with the negotiation and the making of self. The chapter then focuses upon dialogism as an approach that can help us to understand the stories of the older lesbians and gay men.

Chapter 6 - Themes: The different self

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore two aspects of a theme that emerged from the analysis of the interviews that took place with the older lesbians and gay men. The theme is the 'self as different' and the two aspects are:

1. The claim to naturalness,
2. Resistance and separation.

These aspects reflect different parts of the interviewees' life experiences and are intrinsically linked to the idea of the making of self. The first refers to their experience of recognising their emerging sexuality as 'other' and a belief that, for them, being lesbian or gay is a perfectly natural state. The aspect of resistance and separation is located at the other end of the life course and refers to the older lesbians and gay men who participated in research choosing to be separate from other older people and is based upon their individual rejection of institutionalised care for older people. This latter issue is informed by the conditions in which the older lesbians and gay men have lived most of their adult lives in which homophobia and the privileging of heterosexuality acted to ensure that, out of necessity, their very being became both a site of resistance and one in which enforced separation was made manifest.

6.2 The claim to naturalness

The individual narratives of both the men and women contain references to a point in their lives or a point in time at which they became aware of and recognised the nature of their sexuality, that they were either lesbian or gay. However, there is a significant gender division in both the description of this acknowledgement and the point in their lives at which this occurred. For the men, this awareness coincided with an attraction to other men at an early age, whilst for the women, it occurred later in their lives.

The assertion that the older lesbians and gay men make about the naturalness of their expression of sexuality touches on a number of different and quite fundamental arguments which focus on both the nature of sexuality and the nature of knowledge. In examining the claim to naturalness, I will establish the basis upon which the assertions are made, explore these in terms of remembered time and the effect that this has on the nature of the knowledge that is being generated. I will also consider the situation, context and influence of the interviews as the process through which the knowledge has emerged.

Ian is very clear that he knew by the age of eight years that he was attracted to people of his own gender and that this acknowledgement is associated with the giving and receiving of pleasure. Recounting his experiences of playing 'doctors and nurses' as a child he states that he had a lack of interest in girls or women:

'... I never wanted to examine the girls I always wanted to examine the boys - I was the doctor - I wanted to examine the boys - not the girls - I just wasn't interested in the girls - I just never was...'

Robert and Steven locate their memory of being attracted to their same sex at the ages of five and four respectively. This memory of attraction was for Robert to the feel of his father's bare chest and for Steven it involved an attraction to a friend of his father. Robert's narrative does not contain any references to the rejection of any attraction or interest in women. However, Steven does recount being shy in the presence of women but neither man indicates a lack of interest in women at this time in their lives which is clearly part of lan's narrative.

References to an awareness of their interest in people of the same sex at an early age raises a number of quite significant issues, not least that they have set their memories of such attraction within their pre-pubescent childhood. As a result, their narratives assert memories of same sex attraction prior to both the physical manifestation of their sexuality at puberty and their conscious awareness of their own sexuality and attraction. In this respect, we can see that each of the men is locating their lifelong attraction to other men in the conditions of a socially constructed 'innocent' childhood thereby implicitly asserting that their sexuality is, in fact, a 'natural' state and not the subject of a conscious decision. Allied to this assertion is the essentialist argument that maintains that their sexuality was determined from birth and is part of their genetic or physiological composition as evidenced by these very early memories of same sex attraction. This claim to the naturalness of their sexuality enables each of them to assert the 'trueness' of their sexuality, in the sense that they are real or true gay men because their attraction to other men asserted itself at a very early age and has been a consistent feature throughout their lives.

In exploring these assertions further, we need to be aware that there is a temporal component to these statements in that they were made within a process of interviews that were exploring the development of their sexuality and that these interviews were taking place in a very different legal and social environment than when the events that they were recalling actually occurred. As a consequence, there are two aspects of this issue to which we need to have regard: the first being the act of remembering the past, and the second being the social conditions in which the act of remembering the past are located.

In terms of the first aspect, this is a complex matter that involves an interaction between the physiological and the psychological, between the social or the group and the individual, and between history and a life lived. Stanley (1994) identifies epistemological concerns which arise from the exploration of the present and the past in terms of memory. Her concerns rest with recalling the past within the context of the present and with a view of the future. The issues that she raises reflect those of Mead (1932) who regarded the past and the future as expansions out of the present. Thus the past is not a fixed condition but one that will vary in accordance with any particular present. Ricoeur (1981) identifies the illusion of sequence or of chronology within oral testimony, recognising that storytelling is, in fact, subject to both conscious and unconscious influences.

The primary focus of my research has been on the meaning that is given by the participants to certain remembered events in their lives. Establishing the 'truth' is therefore less important than establishing the meaning that is derived from the recalled event. In an oral history approach, some aspects of memory can be triangulated against historical fact and social process; however, there will inevitably be no third party historical account of the feelings and emotions

generated when a particular five year old boy in the 1930s was held against the bare chest of his father and the meaning that was derived from that event.

Crucially it is that meaning which is significant because of its influence on how individuals makes sense of what has happened to them, which, in Robert's case, was his response to the feel of his father's chest which became significant in his construction of his meaning of self.

The idea that reconstituted memory is an influence of many factors including different aspects of memory, as well as the context in which the memory is recalled, which includes the purpose and the audience is identified by Josselson:

'narrative is the representation of a process, of a self in conversation with itself and with its world over time. Narratives are not records of facts of how things actually were, but of a meaning-making system that makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of a life.'

(Josselson 1995:35)

As a result, a narrative can change and develop to meet the needs of the present and the context in which the narrative is being given. The importance of the context in which the story is being told is highlighted by Plummer (1995) who argues that such storytelling assists in the creation of both coherence and structure which, in turn link the past with the present and the future. As such, he argues that our remembered past represents our *'best stories'* which ring true, not least because of the number of times that we may repeat them, but also that they assume a ritualised component:

'We all have our good stories that we like to tell often. But they come to

assume an autonomous life of their own - the story takes on a certain style, an embellishment, which may be much removed from what actually happened.'

(Plummer 1995:40)

There is, as Plummer suggests, an ephemeral nature to the remembered past:

'...no stories are true for all time and space: we invent our stories with a passion, they are momentarily true, we may cling to them, they may become our lives and then we may move on. Clinging to the story, changing the story, reworking it, denying it. But somewhere behind all this story telling there are real active embodied, impassioned lives.'

(Plummer 1995:170)

This framing of memory and narrative has its roots in philosophical debates about the nature of knowledge, about how it is constructed and what use is made of it. If we accept Plummer's assertion that our stories are ephemeral, based on our memories which, in turn, are laid down and informed by our individual interpretation of events, our subsequent recall of these events is not necessarily based on the sequence or the chronology of the events, but rather on its significance to the person who is recalling their story. In this instance, the issue is the association of a pre-pubescent memory with post-pubescent activities and the development of and recognition of the sexual self. In Robert's example, a pre-pubescent memory is linked with post-pubescent activities and the development of his sexual self. For each of the men whose narrative is contained within this thesis, the process of remembering their first awareness of a difference in their sexuality

evoked different memories but is set within a common life course frame and it is this which is significant.

Time is also an important issue in association with memory. Martin and D'Augelli (2009) maintain that time has two major dimensions, namely historical and biographical, the latter Fischer-Rosenthal (2000) earlier referred to as phenomenological time. In terms of biographical time, two different conceptual approaches are referred to by Martin and D'Augelli (2009), the first being the 'life span' or 'life cycle' approach which is identified by Cohler and Galatzer-Levy (2000) within which many of the development models of lesbian and gay identity can be located. The second approach, which is more useful to my research, is that of 'sexual lifeways' proposed by Herdt who comments that such an approach focuses on:

'the specific erotic ideas and emotions, categories, and roles that constitute individual development within a particular sexual culture.'

(1997:20, cited in Martin and D'Augelli 2009:193)

This specific understanding of biographical time facilitates an understanding of the interface between the memories that an individual maintains and the influence of the culture or sub-culture within which they as individuals are situated which, in turn, may influence their understanding of themselves over time. Plummer (1995) provides an illustration of such an influence in his reference to the popularity within lesbian gay communities in the early 1990s of biological determinist accounts of lesbian and gay sexuality which focused around Simon LeVay's (1993) work. Such biological accounts, which were also being articulated prior to the 1990s, reflect the essentialist aspects of the nature/nurture binary and suggest that being lesbian

or gay is a product of the individual's biology. Given such ideas we can see that the men's claim to naturalness through their assertion that they were aware of their sexuality at an early age may be, in part, influenced by the biological determinist approaches that Plummer asserts were so popular in the early 1990s at a time when the older lesbians and gay men were in their late 50s and early 60s.

The claim to naturalness in terms of their sexuality which is made by the men in their narratives can therefore be seen both in terms of their individual understanding of the meaning that they make of the events in their own lives through the act of remembering but also in terms of the interaction that was the particular interview. This highlights not only the role of the researcher in interaction with the person being interviewed, but also the broader social context in which the interview is taking place which brings me to the second aspect of the examination of the claim to naturalness which is the context in which the act of remembering was taking place.

The interviews took place between 2005 and 2007 in a very different social climate from that in which the events being remembered took place. This is the distinction between an atmosphere of severe oppression when the memories were being made and an atmosphere of much greater acceptance and legal recognition for lesbians and gay men of any age when the stories were being told. In a social atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance, both the older gay men and the older lesbians knew that they were being interviewed by a confident and 'out' gay man. There is a possibility that my presentation of self was implicitly influential in establishing the certainty of the expression of both the men's and the women's own sexual selves. This influence may be more easily imagined or observable with

the men in terms of a shared or common sexuality but may equally have been present in my interactions with the women in terms of both gendered patriarchal relationships and the influence of the trueness of self. As I implicitly articulate a 'trueness' of my sexual self, this becomes the contingent and situational standard to which both the women and also the men need to achieve and measure themselves against: I too am like you. The inference is that as the past is an extension of a very different present, the stories told and the meaning derived from those stories situated in the past are given different meanings based on the influence of the conditions of the present. This does not deny the reality of the stories in their narratives or their understanding of the meaning of the events that took place in their lives. However, in acknowledging the influence of the interaction that is the interview, an additional aspect is added to the critical reflection on such stories.

Somewhat contradictorily, whilst the men were very clear that they were aware of their sexuality from a very early age, an assertion from which they draw a sense of themselves as 'real' gay men, two of the men (Robert and Steven) also report that when they were teenagers they believed that they were awaiting the arrival of heterosexuality. The idea that heterosexuality would eventually arrive for them is a reflection of the power of heteronormative discourses and that such ideas are received and believed to be normative in their expression:

'...well I assumed that eventually heterosexuality would kick in - I believed the myth that you are told - it is only a phase that you are going through young man - um... and I just believed that eventually I would get interested in girls...'

(Steven 17/8/06)

Whilst awaiting the arrival of heterosexuality, both men continued with their same sex activities, associating these activities with a developmental life stage or phase that they would grow out of. There are two significant points here: the first being the juxtaposition with their earlier statements that they were aware of their sexuality at an early age; and the second being the apparently widespread knowledge of the ideas associated with Freud's phased development of sexuality which, in general terms, views same sex attraction as a phase on the path to becoming heterosexual which is viewed as the sexually mature state for human beings. This latter point of interest suggests that the discourses related to developmental aspects of sexual maturity had, at some point in their lives, entered their understanding of sexuality which, in turn, infers the widespread lay acceptance or appropriation of particular psychological approaches.

The women's claims to the naturalness of their sexuality involve similar considerations that need to be taken into account in terms of memory, time and the nature of knowledge. In the women's narratives, this assertion is not made in reference to their age nor is it about being attracted to other women at an early age. Rather, it is associated with events that took place later in their lives and are linked to acts undertaken with other women, most notably their first same sex kiss. This recognition of their sexuality is most typified by Gail:

'yes and I really really liked her and I just flirted with her like mad and she kissed me one day and that was it... and yes it was - it was so enlightening it was unbelievable that this light went on and everything was explainable and different really...'

(Gail 19/3/07)

All three women talk of experiencing a moment of revelation or an epiphany in which they finally became aware of themselves as being a lesbian and as being different and that this difference is who they really are and who they have always been. This is articulated in their narratives through their awareness that their sexuality emerged in relational terms and within the context of romantic love. In a comment which, in some part, reflects the position articulated by the three women about romantic love, Hite argues:

'women are deserting marriage in droves, either through divorce, or emotionally, leaving with a large part of their hearts...Most, after an initial period of trying, have gone on to find other places to invest their emotional lives. Woman after woman, after the initial years of "trying to get through" gives up and begins to disengage quietly, gradually, perhaps even unnoticeably.'

(1988:526, cited in Giddens 1991:90)

Hite goes on:

'As one woman says, love keeps returning to us, resurfacing perhaps as some kind of key: 'In some ways which I cannot find the words for yet, romantic love contains the key to my identity - to discovering myself, my inner being.' Many women feel this way. Why? Perhaps women are right to come back, to try again to make love work or understand why it does not...most want not just 'love', but the kind or real love they are talking about. And so it is no surprise that women who are in relationships so often still talk about a 'deeper love' to come,

have a hidden part of themselves that believes that there is more, more to life somehow... and indeed, shouldn't there be?.'

(Hite 1988:655 cited in Giddens 1991:91)

Whilst Hite's comments do not completely reflect the situations in which the three women were placed, the references to love as a condition of the quality of a relationship and the vehicle for their individual hopes, aspirations and the measurement of their difference is contained within their narratives. Weeks notes that love is fashioned 'contingently' and situationally as the prime component of intimate relationships and that it has also become the measure of '*...personal choice and self making, a mode of communication rather than an eternal truth*' (Weeks 1995:39). He goes on to reiterate Giddens' (1992) comment that women have a '*new ability to take control of their lives...*' (Weeks 1995:39). In illustrating the taking of such control, Weeks draws us to one of the three types of love identified by de Beauvoir (1962), that being contingent love which is described as manifesting itself as short term involvements which are both passionate and sexual in nature. Weeks argues that this expression of love is becoming the norm. The narratives of both Rachel and Gail contain reference to the involvement of another woman in the awakening of their recognition of their sexuality. However, for these women the 'kiss' has a symbolic component. The symbolism is one of self recognition, confirmation and affirmation; this is who I am and I am not that. Both Rachel and Gail are clear in their narratives that being with a woman was the experience that confirmed their sense of their sexual self and that being a lesbian rather than heterosexual is their true nature. Janice on the other hand did not experience such an epiphany, rather her revelation occurred as a result of her husband commenting that other people thought she was a lesbian and it was this

ascription that, for Janice, provided recognition and meaning which, in turn, revealed her true nature.

The references made by the older lesbians to both the discovery of their true selves and the rejection of their husband, marriage and heterosexuality are somewhat more complex than the presentation at this point. Each of the women was married and each marriage was undertaken in circumstances that were themselves the subject of numerous influences. Janice married the first person who had ever told her that they loved her and Rachel married, in part, to get away from her mother. Despite the circumstances that surrounded Gail's separation from her husband, she refers to him positively and the delay in Rachel's divorce was directly attributable to the fact that she liked him and continued to do so throughout her life. Given that each of the women engaged in marital heterosexual relationships prior to acknowledging or discovering their sexual selves and that none of the men entered such relationships, this would suggest that there is a gendered process operating. I am referring here to patriarchy and the oppression of women by men (see Chapter 7) which in the earlier part of Rachel, Janice, and Gail's lives meant that women were very much more constrained than in contemporary society. At that time, unmarried women could not obtain access to either public housing or bank accounts. More importantly, they were presented with the imperative of heterosexual marital relationships as the desired expectation for women and which presented the opportunity for a different life to the one that they had experienced as younger people.

The desire for romantic love, symbolised by the 'kiss', becomes, in turn, the site of passion, sexual encounters and equally of choice, individuality, self discovery and a belief that this is who they truly are. For the men, this 'trueness' is located within

pre-pubescent childhood and becomes a statement which asserts 'I am a real gay man because I knew when I was very young'. In both instances, this reference to trueness or realness reflects the understanding of sexuality in its binary expression of essentialist or constructionist. The references of both the men and the women to 'trueness' would suggest that this is, in fact, an expression of the essentialist understanding in that lesbians and gay men were biologically made that way and that their sexuality is a consequence of their biology. Equally, within these stories another oppositional binary is being articulated - that of the homosexual/heterosexual binary in which the individual is clearly located in one or the other. Interestingly, there is no reference or understanding in the narratives of either the men or the women to more recent, post-modern, understandings of sexuality. This is particularly significant for the women, all of whom were married and had engaged in heterosexual relationships prior to their rejection of that identity. Weeks' idea that sexuality and sexual identity are both situational and contingent giving rise to a fluidity of sexuality based on circumstances and desire does not feature in their narratives at all. In fact, rather than any post-modern understanding, individually the women and the men are very clear that they are lesbians or gay men and for the women that their marital heterosexual relationships were a mistake.

This claim to naturalness is very powerful in terms of providing an insight into how they understand the meaning that is given to their respective sense of self. Both the men and the women are very clear that they are either gay men or lesbians and that is their true self. However we view this assertion of the naturalness of their sexuality, what is important is that in different ways all of the men and the women have made this claim and it is from this that they derive the idea that they

are 'true' lesbians or gay men and, as such, their selves are different to the rest of society.

6.3 Resistance and separation

Ideas of resistance and separation have arisen from analysis of the interviews.

They emerged in the narratives about being older people, although the theme is set within the context of their lived experiences as lesbians and gay men.

Consistently and frequently within the narratives of each of the men and the women, there are examples of their own and other people's reactions to both lesbian and gay men in general and also to their own sexuality. These comments are pervasive in the sense that they refer to all aspects of an individual's life and are predominantly, if not wholly, negative in content.

Ian provides us with an example in which he was being referred to negatively.

Derogatory language constructed an image of him based on his individual characteristics and presentation of self, when he was referred to as a 'poofter'.

However, Ian's interest in and prowess at sporting activity facilitated for him an alternative stereotypical image in which being sporty meant being manly and being manly had the result that the person could not possibly be gay or a 'poofter'. Ian does state later that he employed sport and sporting activity as a 'smokescreen' to divert attention away from both his sexuality and the absence of a girlfriend in his life, as he was perceived to be too busy being a very successful long-distance runner to even have the time to have a girlfriend:

'...someone once said something about - oh he's a poofter and one of the girls said don't be daft he plays football and cricket and that was

the words and I thought that was a good - cause I realised by this point - 13 or 14 - you know - that I probably was a bit different - cause I wasn't interested in girls - but I decided later in my teens that you had to show some interest - you had to have some sort of - where may be - you know co-existed - you know so I took them dancing... I mean people called each other poofters and pansies and things like that you know - I mean if someone got hurt and they cried they were a pansy - you know they were a big girl's blouse - whatever expression was in the news that week - you know type thing - um no I just took it as he was insinuating that I'm that way but I'm not telling him type thing - I knew - I wasn't going to give him the - I didn't have to say anything - I didn't have to defend myself cause it was don't be a daft aputh he plays football and cricket - you know this was the attitude of one of the older lads - if you played football and cricket no way could you be - gay.'

(Ian 31/5/07)

Gail provides a further illustration of the influence of negative stereotypes in her reference to an incident as a teenager when she had her hair cut:

'...who at the age 16 was very obviously gay and very butch looking I found quite frightening - and not because she was horrible or threatening or anything - I just found her whole appearance quite frightening and I remember the first time I had my hair cut short - I had it cut like Elaine Paige's cut right short over my ears and I looked in the mirror and I thought god I look so butch - so after that I would never go anywhere without earrings in as well - so I think I had a fear of looking

like that - so that must have been based on something ... very much aware that it was less feminine shall we say - having my hair cut so short.'

(Gail 19/3/07)

In this account, Gail is horrified that she might be seen as being 'butch' and describes her subsequent attempts to soften this image by wearing earrings which themselves are presented as an article which 'feminised' her appearance. This association, based as it is on perceived negative imagery, highlights the assumption that being feminine means that you cannot be a lesbian and that to be a lesbian means that you have to be a woman with the appearance of a man. In both Ian's and Gail's examples, these stereotypes act in a reductionist manner to afford an oversimplified imagery which is both received and understood by others and which is then employed pejoratively.

Whilst sport and sporting prowess worked successfully for Ian as a diversionary tactic whilst he was serving in the Royal Navy, the structures in which he was placed did, in general, react strongly to any suspicions that an individual in the armed services might be lesbian or gay:

'...the one friend that I did have - closer friend that I had - he got caught through somebody else's big mouth - um - somebody got caught for doing something else and he blabbed about - so it was investigated - by the Naval Police - and er - it came out - this little hide out where they used to go - and er names came out...and they took him inside and had a shrink with him - they had - our own medical people - and there was this shrink who he had never seen

before - and the naval police there and they were questioning him - he eventually said that he had been there but it was only to see what was happening...but they decided he was to have aversion therapy - and he told me - what they did - was as I say - showed him pictures of naked fellas and if he showed any reaction he got an electric shock - they showed him pictures of naked women and if he not no reaction they gave him a pleasant shock - you know - so they were supposed to react to the female rather than the male - he said it didn't work - he's still gay now - definitely didn't work with him but - but as I say - he did get chunked out of the Navy - unfortunately - he didn't get chunked out on disgrace - he got chunked on medical grounds - they found medical grounds for it - psychiatric medical grounds - but um - I say - it did happen.'

(Ian 31/5/07)

The discharge on psychiatric medical grounds both illustrates and exemplifies the dominant discourses that maintained that being gay was in fact an illness and as previously identified Kochman states that gay men were individually labelled as *'sick by doctors, immoral by clergy, unfit by the military, and a menace by the police'* (1997:2). The extent of the reaction to gay men is reflected in Foucault's commentary on the history of sexuality:

'Through various discourses, legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied; sexual irregularity was annexed to mental illness; from childhood to old age, a norm of sexual development was defined and all possible deviations were carefully described; pedagogical controls and medical treatments were organized; around the least fantasies, moralists,

but especially doctors, brandished the whole emphatic vocabulary of abomination.'

(Foucault 1987:36)

This discourse of homosexuality as illness is both pervasive and powerful and has its roots in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the emerging disciplines of psychology and sexology and with commentators such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1886) and Henry Havelock Ellis (1897). Having established the presence of an illness, treatment regimes were developed, which, as Ian has described, focused around aversion therapies but also included drug therapies and psycho-surgery. Wintrip (2009) notes that it was not until 1994 that the World Health Organisation removed 'homosexuality' as a mental illness from the International Classification of Diseases.

Robert makes a reference to the reaction of the state in terms of the criminal prosecution of gay men (which is explored in Chapter 2):

'...and then there was a famous court case around this time - the early 50s - probably late 40s - when Lord Montagu of Beaulieu got caught...'

(Robert 13/7/05)

This action of the state had the consequence that, for most gay men and lesbians, the risk of being 'caught' meant severe consequences for the individual and what was perceived on the whole as a private and hidden aspect of their lives would be made public. Robert describes his fear of the repercussions of being caught on his relationships and, in particular, the effect that knowledge of his sexuality would have on his mother:

'I suppose it was a general ethos - culture that if you were gay it was something that you kept to yourself or with other gay people if you knew anybody - um I mean at that time it was illegal but I didn't really think I mustn't do this because I am breaking the law - it was just that I would like to do it but I didn't want anybody to know - um so yes it was I don't really think it was parental - I suppose really I thought if I told my mother I was gay that she would probably have been upset and I think that probably she would have been - I think like most parents they would like to be grandparents and I know that she would have liked me to have got married - and have children and yes I don't think it was really - I just didn't want to upset her - I mean and I think it would have if I had told her and there didn't seem to be any point in it... feeling that I shouldn't be doing this - it's wrong.'

(Robert 6/9/05)

Robert's description of his feelings and his fear of being caught illustrates the internalisation of both homophobia and heteronormativity which, in turn, become the expressions of the use of power by one group to oppress another.

Homophobia and heteronormativity were not only internalised by lesbians and gay men, they also found their expression through the day to day contact with other people as heteronormativity equally regulates, organises and normalises the behaviour of heterosexuals. As Janice notes in her narrative, people's reactions to her stating that she was a lesbian presented her with face to face hostility and aggression:

'...and the general feeling amongst society or people that I'd come

across - straight people would be if they thought that you were a lesbian or a gay man that they thought you were going to jump on them - they feared that you were - not even that you were going to approach them to talk to them - that you were going to jump on them and have sex with them like that and really aware of how gay people in society the sexuality comes first - not the whole person - just the sexual bit about them is the initial - even it's just a vision that they have got of you - because they don't see you as - how you look like that and you wear them clothes and you do you hair like that and you have got them colour eyes - they just see you as a sexual being and you are into having sex with the same gender - they just see that first and just take that on board first when they talk to you and you feel the - them being scared and the hatred that comes from it and feeling that either pushes you into your closet or you come out fighting - and cause I feel I have had to fight for most of my life - I find it quite easy to - well I think I do it differently - I think I was quite forceful as I was growing up because I was fighting for me life - I was fighting for me and who I was and all the external things seemed to be against me or I didn't fit in so I will have to stand me ground and stay who I am and make sure that everyone is aware that this is who I am.'

(Janice 15/7/07)

All of the stories cited above have been drawn from across the narratives of the six older lesbians and gay men who have themselves articulated how they have throughout their lives been treated differently because of their sexuality. Whilst this differential treatment, reflected through the oppressive systems that are homophobia and heteronormativity, has had palpable meaning in the lives of each of the men and the women, their life courses have broadly followed similar

trajectories. They have identified themselves as being either lesbian or gay despite the undoubted significant personal pressure to conform to the heterosexual norm. The separation that they have endured through the perpetuation in each of their life courses of their sexuality as lesbians and gay men despite the strictures to do otherwise have illustrated how they as individuals have become the living embodiment of resistance. As individuals they have resisted the threat of imprisonment, of being diagnosed as mentally ill, of losing their employment and their families, which for Janice was a reality, in order that their sexuality could be expressed.

The stories identified above are manifestations of the exercise of power and in an often used reference, Foucault (1977:95) insists that *'where there is power there is also resistance.'* Goodley et al. suggests that:

'One key origin of resistance lies in the multiple selves and identities of a discursive world. During the day we may move between the subject positions of parent, partner, colleague, consumer, player and lover. Each of these positions has power connected to them.'

(2004:128)

The movement between multiple selves and identities afforded the opportunity for lesbians and gay men to make agentic decisions in respect of the presentation of their sexuality. Until the death of his mother, Robert maintained that he was celibate with an apparent disinterest in sex and intimate relationships, whilst actually engaging in same sex sexual activity. Steven, on the other hand, chose to identify himself as a gay man in an employment environment that was still hostile to such an identity, whilst at the same time his sexuality remained an unspoken

issue between himself and his parents. Both Robert and Steven and the other four participants in this study resisted the dominant expression of sexuality and, in doing so, developed a sense of themselves that was at variance to heteronormative conceptions of sexuality.

This resistance to the hegemonic dominance of heteronormativity and an associated resilience which is made manifest by their continued resistance to the dominant norm finds its expression through lives that have been lived, the decisions that they made and the events that occurred to them directly as a consequence of their sexuality. In defining resistance, Holmes argues that this represents '*...the struggle against injustice and the fight for control over one's life and actions.*' (2009:81). This definition is set within the context of feminist analyses of the position of women in Western societies and presents us with both the moral imperatives of struggle, fight and control as a reaction to patriarchal oppression and the need to actively resist male oppression in a gendered conflict. There are, however, useful parallels for this definition which can assist us to understand the position of lesbians and gay men which are primarily the references to injustice and its effect on how lives are lived.

The idea or concept of resistance has perhaps been most developed in post-colonial studies in which a distinction is drawn between the active and passive struggle of indigenous peoples against imperial colonial occupation. In highlighting active resistance, attention is drawn to the direct actions of resistance undertaken by indigenous peoples that are in conflict with colonial structures, examples of which are the Indian Mutiny of 1857-58 and the Mau Mau resistance struggle of the Kikuyu people in Kenya in the 1950s. Smith (1999) provides us with an example of passive resistance in the 1870s in New Zealand, in which some of the

Maori people led by Te Whiti refused to engage with British imperial structures, a stance which was perceived as an act of challenge. Mahatma Ghandi in post-war India perhaps symbolises the most well-known source of what is regarded as passive resistance as he undertook non-violent resistance to imperial power. In both these examples, the absence of aggression or aggressive reaction becomes the delineation of passive resistance. However, this understanding is premised on individuals who actively resist oppression by rejecting direct violent confrontation, so the distinction between active and passive resistance is better characterised by the use, or not, of violence.

In employing the term resistance in this work, I am acknowledging that, in fact, resistance takes many forms. As stated above, there is a distinction between violent and non-violent expressions of resistance. However, I am acknowledging that the sheer act of *'being'* is also a powerful site of resistance. Given the conditions in which the current cohorts of older lesbians and gay men lived their lives during the twentieth century, their recognition of themselves as being lesbian or gay in defiance of the heterosexual norm represents a clear act of resistance. Furthermore, acting on this sense of self in terms of engagement in same sex sexual activity further reinforces this sense of resistance. We do need to acknowledge that this was not a universal picture with millions of individual sites of resistance because some older lesbians and gay men did, for a wide variety of reasons, engage in and maintain heterosexual relationships. However, the reality is that the six people who have participated in this research did assert their sexuality and thereby resisted the dominance of heterosexuality through simply *'being themselves'*.

Goodley et al. (2004) suggest that the resistance of agents continues through the telling of, and listening to, stories that encapsulate the realities of subjected selves and which represent a difference from the stories of those who are dominant. In this respect, this research enables and facilitates the continued resistance of the six people whose stories are being told here and to which you are listening. The discourse of resistance becomes somewhat normalised in the broader discourses on ageing. However, this is framed somewhat differently and the object of resistance is perceived to be the biological process of ageing itself. Jerrome argues that:

'...the ideal response to old age is resistance and struggle...the preoccupation with health and fitness, with activity and resistance to the encroachments of age, achieves collective expression in formal meetings and individual expression in informal talk and activities.'

(1992:190)

Jerrome is alluding to the day-to-day comments that form the basis of informal conversations such as "you look young for your age" and "you look well...", with an implied "despite your age". In terms of constructing resistance to ageing, the issue is not about an alternative construct in a similar manner to which lesbians and gay men represent an alternative to heterosexuality. Instead, the act of resistance to ageing is directed at the physical manifestations of the ageing body. Thus resistance becomes analogous with denial articulated through both the presentation of the embodied self and resistance to the social constructs that define older people. Thus resistance becomes the manifestation of an agentic act of denial which is expressed through the embodied self.

In defying both homophobia and heteronormativity, older lesbians and gay men have developed considerable experience of resistance to dominant discourses. The potential exists, therefore, for older lesbians and gay men to become the agentic site of resistance to the dominant discourse related to ageing. However, the power of the dominant discourse on ageing finds expression through the claim to be 'natural' and, as such, becomes normative in the sense that this is what it means to be an older person. The consequence is that older lesbians and gay men appear to have become incorporated into the 'body' that is older people and experience the broader discourses that all older people experience. This incorporation or absorption appears to be the subject of various influences which are functioning at different levels. At a more structural level, the key determinant appears to be chronological age which situates the individual within the broader demographic group that is older people. Once the individual is so situated they are defined in ways that reflect stereotypical images and in particular, by the ascription of asexuality. Older lesbians and gay men, because of their age, become associated with other older people and are, as a result of ageist assumptions regarded in a manner that denies their sexuality which is, and has been, the basis upon which their sense of themselves as different has been located. At the individual level, older lesbians and gay men are negotiating the expression of their sexuality, the broader assumptions that are being made about them as older people and their life course experiences of being defined as the 'other'. The result of these various influences is that older lesbians and gay men are engaged in processes of self-making as they individually negotiate the meaning of being an older person and lesbian or gay. Within the narratives of the six older lesbians and gay men, a new expression of resistance is being established which is quite simply "I have nothing in common with them." The 'them' in this instance refers to other implicitly heterosexual older people. The object of resistance is the prospect of

levels of dependence which may require the current arrangements for institutional care provision for older people.

The continued manifestation of resistance, of the refusal to be included, has occurred despite significant changes that have been made in the last ten years in respect of the status and legal position of lesbians and gay men. The rhetoric of government has moved to a position of both recognising and acknowledging the conditions that exclude individuals and groups from 'mainstream' social structures into a position of active engagement in order to ensure inclusion. The refusal of older lesbians and gay men to be included among older people in general is clearly in opposition to current policy objectives and, whilst as individuals in their earlier lives they were excluded by the actions of the state, they are now adopting a position of self-imposed exclusion. This is an interesting turn of events and may be characterised in terms of the domains upon which these relative positions are being exercised. Thus the state can be characterised as acting in the here and now with no memory of the past, whilst individual older lesbians and gay men are acting with a memory of felt oppression. The following discussion explores this juxtaposition in more detail.

In the period following the election of the Labour Government in 1997, the articulation of oppression through language, individual behaviour and policy began to be challenged employing human rights as the vehicle of change. The Government adopted the rhetoric of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' shaped, in part, by the policy of the European Union. The Nice European Council held in 2000, and the subsequent Directive of the same year, launched a process that is based on four common objectives for inclusion which involve: facilitating participation; preventing the risk of exclusion; helping the most vulnerable; and mobilising all

relevant bodies. In the United Kingdom, the emphasis on understanding exclusion and moving towards an inclusive agenda was placed both on the experiences of individuals and also on geographic areas, primarily housing estates. Perrie suggests that exclusion is:

'a useful term in societies in which there is growing geographical polarisation of access and opportunity, so that often quite small areas – a housing estate, an inner or outer urban area – are cut off from the life around them.'

(1997:3)

Perrie's definition is reflected in Madanipour's work, who claims that:

'Social exclusion is defined as a multi-dimensional process in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes. When combined, they form acute forms of exclusion that find a spatial manifestation in particular neighbourhoods.'

(Madanipour 1998:22)

Both Madanipour and Perrie place an emphasis on particular areas in which there are high levels of unemployment, high levels of poverty, low levels of engagement with the political system as few people vote and high levels of 'disengagement' with society. The key focus of many other commentators is related to the experience of poverty and how being poor has the result that people are unable to participate in 'normal life' because they do not have the resources to do so. But, as

Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997) comment whilst income levels are important in accessing basic human needs income alone does not ensure that this will take place. Clearly, there are other factors beyond poverty which influence the exclusion of people. Berghman points to the:

'non-realisation of citizenship rights within four key societal institutions – the democratic and legal system, the labour market, the welfare system, and the family and community system. '

(1997, cited in Scharf et al. 2001:305)

Traditionally the concept of citizenship has been viewed as comprising a number of elements – political, civil and social rights (Marshall 1950). However, the enactment of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) into United Kingdom law via the Human Rights Act 1998 has brought the discourse on rights and citizenship into much sharper focus. At the same time theoretical understanding of these issues has been influenced by post-modernist deconstruction of accepted concepts such as sexuality. Richardson's (2000) work explores how lesbians and gay men were regarded as citizens at one level but were then subsequently denied equal rights with other citizens.

Richardson identifies three broad elements to the claim for sexual citizenship which are, in turn, divided into rights-based elements each of which is applied to the situation in which women, disabled people and lesbians and gay men are situated. These rights-based elements are:

- Conduct-based rights claims;
- Specification of what an individual can or can not do;
- The right to participate in and enjoy sexual acts;

- Rights of bodily self-control;
- Identity-based rights;
- Right to self determination;
- Right to self expression;
- Rights to self realisation;
- Relationship based rights;
- Rights of consent to sexual practice in relationships;
- Rights to choose sexual partners;
- Right to publicly recognised sexual relationships.

In this rights-based inclusive atmosphere, homophobia, as a system of oppression, was no longer felt to be an appropriate expression of both public bodies and individuals. In order to ensure the inclusion of lesbians and gay men in general, the state acted to change the legal and social status with the result that a number of key points of exclusion were removed. Thus, the age of consent was equalised, employment rights were instituted, it became illegal to discriminate on the basis of sexuality in the provision of goods and services, and an expression of 'marriage' was afforded through the medium of civil partnerships.

Quite literally, the world has significantly changed around older lesbians and gay men. They have spent most of their adult lives experiencing and living with negative reactions to their sexuality. Now, in later life, the differences that resulted in their exclusion are the source of others' active attempts to include and embrace them. The conclusion is that they are no longer different but are, in fact, the same: they are the same as all older people and, as such, they experience a continued exclusion the basis of which is now shared with all older people. However, in their different ways, the older lesbians and gay men interviewees, when reflecting on

their future, identified themselves as not being the same as other older people. Their assertion of their difference is still located within their own sense of their sexual selves which, they argue, requires acknowledgement in the provision of services that are aimed at supporting them. The standard service responses to the needs of dependent older people such as home care, day care and residential and nursing care were felt by each of them to disregard their sexuality. These services were neither felt to be desired nor good enough to support them should the need arise. The following comments from Gail and Steven typify their responses to this issue:

'...so the possibility of living in a care home or EPH [elderly person's home] is not a good outlook for gay women and probably not for gay men either... a total failure to recognise your sexuality and the importance of your past - even if it is not now- but I think that happens to old people anyway - nobody recognises the importance of the past but I suppose the possible ultimate thing of being in care or being in an old people's home and being the only gay woman - that is quite a daunting prospect that is...'

(Gail 30/4/07)

'...if I was unconscious who cares – except that when you come to and you see people giving you those wicked smiles when they pass you that can be worrying I suppose and that is why I was seeing my growing older as a gay man and my personal identity - dignities - because in some ways you begin to lose your identity don't you - that is part of the loss of dignity - when you lose your identity it is a loss of dignity - it is part of the same package you are just a number - 4th bed

down needs his toenails cutting...'

(Steven 4/9/06)

At this point there are a number of significant issues that we need to explore in order to better understand this desire for separation. We need to be careful about the articulation of this desire and try to distinguish on what basis this rejection of services is being made and whether this is, in fact, a very subtle expression of ageism. There are two sets of ideas being articulated here: the first relates to the manner in which such services are delivered; and the second refers to the lived experiences of those who are in receipt of such services. In both Gail and Steven's commentary above, the issue is not the rejection of services *per se* but rather the manner in which care is delivered within these establishments. Intrinsically, the rejection of services is about the perceived lack of individualised care with the consequent result that their sense of selves as lesbians and gay men would be denied. Their concern is that the normative assumptions of ageism *combined with* heteronormativity will initially seek to deny that they have a sexuality and then, if forced to recognise sexuality, will assume that they are heterosexual. Equally, as lesbians and gay men, they are also questioning the basis upon which they would be able to establish relationships with other residents based on the belief that their lives have been so very different. Therefore, they question what they have in common with other older people.

In their rejection of services, we are seeing the manifestation of the consequences of both state sponsored homophobia and the perpetuation of the privileging of heterosexuality as reflected in the life course of these older lesbians and gay men. Their implicit articulation of "what do I have in common with them" is perhaps an unintended and, given the current political climate, an unwanted consequence of

people being treated badly throughout their life course. The difficulty is that the new agenda assumes that the past is forgotten and all is forgiven when, in fact, all that has happened since 1997 is that an injustice has, in part, ended and nominally equal treatment has been established.

In terms of the desire for separation, this does not appear to be based on an understanding that these services are 'good enough for you but are not good enough for me'. The rejection is based on the quality of care offered and a lack of commonality between themselves and other older people. It is in this last assertion that we see a number of very subtle ideas being articulated. The first idea rests with the external functioning of the construct that is ageism and how it acts on the individual. Thus, they are implicitly acknowledging that ageism seeks to homogenise the experience of being an older person and, in doing so, deconstructs their sense of self. In very late life, being an older person is the experience of depersonalisation which, for the older lesbians and gay men, would result in the denial of an important aspect of their sense of self. The second idea rests with the incorporation into their belief that, in very late life, there is only a past with no present and certainly no future, and therefore, whilst in receipt of care the potential of a shared and common present with the prospect of an equally shared and common future will not exist. This is a very subtle, internalised and common expression of ageism which views those who are in very late life as having no future other than death. This perception of ageing and later life will be explored in more detail in Chapter 8.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on two themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews which, in turn, highlight the manner in which the participants in this research regard themselves as being different. The first part of the chapter explored how both the men and the women became aware of their difference in terms of sexuality and how this difference is both a reflection of their 'true' selves and that the 'trueness' of their sexuality is in turn a reflection that they are 'truly' gay or lesbian.

The second focus has explored how, as lesbians and gay men, they were constructed as 'other' and treated negatively based upon such a definition. In being the 'other', they became sites of resistance to the dominant discourses and learnt to live their lives somewhat separate from the broader society. Having lived their lives and made sense of themselves within hostile social environments, the society in which they are situated has changed significantly with the result that they are no longer pejoratively defined as 'other' and have become the object of other people's attempts to include and embrace them. However, having been forced to be separate for most of their lives, their narratives indicate that, in their reflections about their future and, in particular, the potential of dependency and care, they are selecting separation as they articulate a lack of commonality with other older people.

The next chapter will explore their stories related to their individual understandings of their sense of selves as men and women in terms of the constructs that are masculinity and femininity. In locating their sense of selves within these constructs the differences in life course trajectories become more apparent which, in turn,

inform their experiences of being older men and older women. Associated with their experiences of being men and women is their understanding of the world in which they are living and this will form the focus of the second part of the chapter.

Chapter 7 - Themes: The political self

7.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the self in interaction with the external world. Whilst this thesis has concerned itself with expressions of the self that are related to age and sexuality, the embodied and agentic self inevitably reflects additional expressions of the self that act in interaction with each other. Whilst this chapter will explore how the interviewees made sense of, and acted upon, their gendered self, it is important that I acknowledge that the self comprises more than expressions of age, sexuality and gender. Thus the stories that have been told about the lives of the people who participated in my research include other expressions of self such as ethnicity, whiteness, class, relationship status and parenthood. In acknowledging interactions beyond age and sexuality, it becomes possible to understand how the agentic self engages with other agentic selves and how the structure in which they are placed informs agency and how agency is in turn influenced by structure.

I have employed an understanding of the political self which reflects Giddens's idea of 'life politics'. In *'Modernity and self-identity'* (1991), which is reflected in *'The transformation of intimacy'* (1992), Giddens argues that 'life politics' is essentially a reflection of lifestyle, which incorporates expressions of self identity, sexual identity, gender relations and importantly emotions. He states that:

'Emotion and motivation are inherently connected. Today we think of motivation as "rational" - the driving pursuit of profit on the part of the entrepreneur, for example - but if emotion is wholly resistant to rational

assessment and ethical judgement, motives can never be appraised except as means to ends or in terms of their consequences.'

(Giddens 1992:201)

His inclusion of emotions in his definition of life politics has significance for my research given that I have been focusing on the meaning that individual older lesbians and gay men attribute to events that have occurred in their lives. In focusing on meaning and understanding, I feel that it is important to acknowledge not only the practical, tangible consequences of the events that older lesbians and gay men were asked to recall, but also the emotional component of such memories. Such a component recognises the additional aspect of the meaning given to these life events, with the result that we can not only achieve a better understanding of both the tangible consequences of particular actions, but also how the individual felt about what was happening to them and the emotional effect on them. Plummer's (1995) reference to our '*best stories*' not only reflects those stories that are perceived to be interesting, or from which specific consequences can be derived, but also incorporates an emotional component in terms of how the person felt and feels in recalling the events and in telling the story.

The chapter explores how the external world has exerted an influence on the life courses of the interviewees; the meaning that the older lesbians and gay men made of such influences and, of course, how they felt about what was happening. Whilst this chapter focuses on gendered expressions of the self, I wish to set the context of the gendered self by exploring the intersection of other expressions of self such as class, ethnicity, parenthood and relationship status through which it becomes possible to achieve a deeper understanding of the gendered agentic self. The chapter will then explore the influence that the constructs of masculinity and

femininity have had on the interviewees' lives. This chapter will articulate the complexities and subtleties that are associated with trying to understand the self when that self has a past, a present and a future. The process of exploring these issues - the interview - has a dynamic which itself influences the narratives that are employed in order to make sense of the world and which will be taken into account.

7.2 Intersectionality and the self

The older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research are, as a result of their own circumstances and lived lives, complex individuals who, in turn, are the summation of complex processes. These processes are reflected in the structures in which they have been, and are, situated and their own agency, which, in turn, made sense of these structures, how they have interpreted the world and lived their lives. In the previous chapter, we have seen how, as individuals, they each made sense of the structures that strongly defined their sexuality in negative terms and lived their lives resiliently resisting the strictures of hegemonic heterosexuality. Whilst this thesis focuses on issues of age and sexuality, how these issues interface with other expressions of self becomes important in providing a broader understanding of the sense that is made of the lived experience.

This section will explore the intersection of different expressions of self that are relevant to this work and which afford an additional element of understanding of the selves that are the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research. The different expressions of self that will be explored are those

associated with class, gender, race and ethnicity, whiteness, parenthood and being single.

The issue of the intersection of different expressions of the self emerged from the acknowledgement that, on the whole, studies of gender and race and ethnicity did not adequately reflect the social position that black women occupied. Thus the studies of gender gave primacy to the gender of black women, whilst race and ethnicity studies gave primacy to ethnicity and, in doing so, neither was able to effectively describe what it meant to be a black woman. Davies comments *'that the experiences and struggles of women of colour fell between the cracks of both feminist and anti-racist discourse.'* (2008:68). Crenshaw (1989) used the term 'intersectionality' to describe the ways in which race and gender interact with each other in order to influence the employment experiences of black women. In a subsequent analysis, Crenshaw (1991) adds class to race and gender as part of her core interactions but then also acknowledges that there exist other intersections which shape and inform the lived experience. In this respect, as Davies states:

'Intersectionality fit[s] neatly into the postmodern project of conceptualizing multiple shifting identities. It coincided with Foucauldian perspectives on power that focused on dynamic processes and the deconstruction of normalizing and homogenizing categories.'

(2008: 71)

Whilst intersectionality as a concept offers the potential of an additional layer of analysis of the lived experience, its application reflects its origins in that the intersection of race, gender and class becomes privileged. This is articulated by Gamson and Moon in their comment that sexuality was treated '*...as a weakly integrated addendum to the list of intersecting oppressions...*' (2004:52). Whilst Davies (2008) does later acknowledge that sexuality is a key issue of intersection, the acknowledgement of age as an element of intersectionality is, on the whole, largely ignored. The absence of age is reflected in Knusden's work when she acknowledges that:

'Gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class and nationality are categories that may enhance the complexity of intersectionality, and point towards identities in transition.'

(2006:61)

The exclusion of age as an element for the analysis of the lived experience is significant and has the effect of denying aspects of the lived experience of older people. Thus the lived experience of the black woman, who was so much the focus of the early writers on intersectionality, changes as she ages to become an old black woman. In many respects, this absence of the consideration of age as an intersecting vector for analysis reflects Healey's (1994) comments outlined in Chapter 2, which are related to the invisibility of older women in general, and older lesbians in particular.

The issue of class in later life further illustrates the significance of the absence of age in the consideration of intersectionality, as the use of class as a method of social differentiation becomes difficult in later life. In identifying the conditions which inform an understanding of class, Moody (1998) comments that there are four influences which are significant: namely occupation, income, property and education. Given the current arrangements of enforced retirement and exclusion from the labour market, the issue of occupation as an influence on the class position of older people rests with pre-retirement employment. Using this measure of class status, Steven and Gail were both involved in professional employment (it should be noted that Gail was still employed when she was being interviewed); Robert was in a professional technical role; Ian was employed in a clerical role; Janice worked in a manual job and Rachel was self-employed. In terms of income, the second of Moody's measures of class position, all of the participants in my research except Gail were in receipt of the state pension. Steven, Robert and Ian additionally received an occupational pension, which Gail will also receive when she retires. However, Rachel and Janice were not receiving an occupationally based pension. Using property as a measurement of class position, Steven, Robert and Gail owned their own homes whilst Ian, Janice and Rachel lived in rented accommodation.

The final factor of Moody's influences on social class - education - is reflected in the life courses of the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research as Steven, Gail, Robert and Ian all went to university, whilst Janice undertook specific employment related training. The narratives of each of the people who participated in my research who experienced education beyond secondary level contain many references to their understanding of broader political and social

processes as well as their own reflexive accounts of the effect of such processes on their lives. Equally, educational attainment and professional training was significant for Steven, Gail and Robert who were able to enter the professions of their choosing and thereby achieve a professional identity. The ascription of such a professional identity has significance for both Steven and Robert who assume the title of being retired from identified professions (at the time of the interviews Gail was still employed within her chosen profession). Janice's employment-based training enabled her to seek and gain opportunities for promotion within her employment field.

The more obvious implications of these four influences on class position are, in part, reflected upon by Bond and Corner (2004) who claim that, in general, older women are significantly poorer than older men based on reduced access to occupational pension schemes when younger, interrupted employment patterns due to caring, child bearing and parenting responsibilities and increased longevity. They go on to comment that manual workers also experience lower income levels in later life for similar reasons. These issues become part of the stories of the participants in my research. Thus Gail states that, because of an incomplete contribution record, she can not afford to retire, despite wanting to. Steven's pension is lower than he would ordinarily have expected because of his early retirement, which itself is directly related to his sexuality, although he remains financially secure and comfortable. Both Robert and Ian also regard themselves as financially comfortable. Janice, whilst retired and in receipt of a state pension, is engaged in creative art activities from which she hopes to draw an income. Rachel is in receipt of state benefits, which, in part, reflects her age at the onset of her severe chronic ill health and her self-employed status.

In broader terms, there is a distinction based upon gender between these six people, as, in general, the women's financial position is much less secure and comfortable than the men's. In terms of intersectionality and the analysis of the lived experience, we can see that Janice is an older black woman who was engaged in manual employment all her working life. This type of employment and her gender influenced her access to occupational pension schemes and her ability to contribute to these schemes with the result that she is now financially dependent on her state pension and is seeking additional income in order to support herself. The intersections between systems of oppression are what Janice refers to as her 'treasures' and she admits that she has spent a lifetime exploring their meaning. The next section in this chapter contains a more extensive exploration of the intersection between race and gender but, at this point, it is worth noting a dichotomy between Janice's own experiences and research and commentary about the interface between black and lesbian and gay identities. Negal (2000:113) comments that *'Ethnicity and sexuality are strained, but not strange bedfellows'*. Whilst the intersection of sexuality and ethnicity are regarded by Negal as *'strained'*, the following comment from Janice refers to her feelings of safety entering black clubs as a black lesbian:

'...but at the same time you were safe there [place] – I felt safe there – I felt safe going to the black clubs and showing them that I was gay – you know I would go with a white girlfriend – I didn't have any black girlfriends – well I didn't know any black girls who were gay when I first came out...'

(Janice 15/7/07)

Janice also comments in a subsequent interview that she has very good relationships with the young black men that live in her neighbourhood, all of whom know her as an older black lesbian. However, Janice's life course may suggest why her experiences of being a black lesbian are different. Having been placed into the care system at birth, Janice did not grow up within a black family or within a black community. In fact, she was thirteen before she recognised that she was black. Her description of exploring her 'treasures' includes what it means to be both black and a lesbian and she has more recently begun to explore what it means for her to be an older black lesbian.

Whilst Janice has explored the meaning of her 'treasures' of being both a black woman and a lesbian, her exploration is set within the context of being the 'other'. This sense of being the 'other' has a very different meaning for the remaining participants in my research as this difference rests in the expression of their sexuality. The issue of race and ethnic identity was not perceived to be significant for the other participants in my research, which, in turn, reflects the absence or lack of recognition of the discourse of whiteness as an ethnic identity. Frankenberg defined whiteness as:

'...the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality and privilege rather than disadvantage.'

(1993:236)

Green and Sonn further elucidate this definition by commenting that:

'Whiteness ...refers to the normativity of being white, that is, the invisibility to white people of the privilege and dominance they experience as a consequence of being white. Simply put, white skin is privileged by institutions and practices and provides material and psychological entitlements to white people.'

(2006:381)

The implications of both Frankenberg's and Green and Sonn's comments are that as white people, Ian, Robert, Steven, Gail and Rachel did not have to consider their ethnic identity in the same manner that Janice has and, furthermore, have benefited from the privileging of their white ethnic identity. In this sense, there is no presence in their narratives of a discourse related to their ethnic identity, the recognition of which, McDonald (2009) argues, troubles white people because ethnic identity is something that belongs to black people - the 'other'. Green and Sonn (2006:381) go on to argue that *'white people experience their whiteness'* in different ways reflecting the intersection of other expressions of the self such as class, gender and sexuality. Thus, for Gail and Rachel, their sense of being the 'other' would be located in both their gender and their sexuality, whilst for the men their sense of being the 'other' rests in their sexuality and of being perceived as not 'real' men in a hierarchy of masculinity.

The absence of the discourse of ethnic identity in the narratives of the white participants in my research is reflected, as we will see, in the discourse of gender

that appears in the narratives of the men. In this respect, the narratives of the women include frequent references to themselves as women whilst the men's narratives have no reference to their gendered selves. In the case of whiteness, this becomes an unspoken discourse for the white participants in my research because it is a taken for granted privileged state as much as being male is a taken for granted privileged position for Ian, Robert and Steven.

The issue of parenthood presents another intersection between gender and sexuality. Of the six people who participated in my research, three were parents, all of whom were the older lesbians. In each case, their children were born within the context of heterosexual marital relationships which were entered into prior to the acknowledgment of their sexuality. Janice was the only one to have lost contact with her children, which was a consequence of her sexuality influencing the divorce settlement and her ex-partner's move to another city hundreds of miles away from where she was living.

Golombok (2007) comments that, in the 1970s, the majority of lesbian mother families were formed as a result of the mother's previous heterosexual relationship. This period, the 1970s, is significant for the older lesbians who participated in my research because, as lesbian mothers, they were being subjected to considerable vilification as a result of their status which is reflected in Rhodes Boyson's¹³ comment:

'This evil must stop for the sake of the potential children and society,

¹³ Rhodes Boyson was a Conservative Member of Parliament holding ministerial appointments for Social Security (1983-84), Northern Ireland (1984-86) and Local Government (1986-87). He was knighted and became a member of the Privy Council.

which both have enough problems without the extension of this horrific practice. Children have a right to be born into a natural family with a father and a mother. Anything less will cause lifelong deprivation of the most acute kind for the child.'

(Rhodes Boyson 1978, quoted in Golombok 2007:xxi)

The arguments related to protecting the hegemonic heterosexual marital unit (the family), echoes of which run through Rhodes Boyson's comment, involved concerns which were expressed from the 1970s through to the 1990s about lesbian and gay family forms and the effect that such arrangements have on the children of such family units. These concerns were related particularly to attachment (see Golombok et al 1997 and Tasker and Golombok 1998); the bullying and harassment of children (see Laird 1998; Malley and Tasker 2001; Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan 2001 and Perlesz et al. 2006): the absence of appropriate role models in terms of gender and sexual identity with a particular focus on the absence of male role models for male children (see Weston 1991 and Patterson 1996) and the 'promotion' of same sex relationships (see Mallon 2004; Tasker and Golombok 1997 and Bailey and Dawood 1998). Given the amount of research undertaken in respect of these issues, Golombok (2007) concludes that the fears that were expressed by Rhodes Boyson and others have not been substantiated and that, furthermore, the assumption that children need a father and a mother has been superseded by an understanding that children need loving parent(s) irrespective of their sexuality. The issue of lesbian or gay parenting still generates emotive responses. However, such arrangements are more widely accepted.

Whilst Boyson's comment in many ways reflects the pervasive and hostile social context in which the older lesbians who participated in my research were themselves bringing up their children, having children and being a parent has had, and continues to have, tangible effects on their life course. Janice's narrative contains many stories about re-establishing contact with her adult children and having to learn to be a parent and a grandparent to their children within the context of the absence of a mother in her own life. This process has also involved her adult children getting to know their lesbian mother. Gail maintains close but different relationships with her children and Rachel is in regular contact with her son with whom she also has a close relationship. Being a parent has ensured that Gail, Janice and Rachel have maintained levels of relational connectivity with others in their role as a mother and, in this respect, although such connectivity is not guaranteed, they have maintained these relationships through their adulthood with the prospect of continuing these roles in later life. The presence of their children within the stories that they have told about their lives indicates the significance of these relationships to them. Both Janice and Rachel experienced the death of one of their children and have talked about living through this experience and the effect that it had on them as individuals and on their relationships with their other children.

Whilst the importance of being a parent and of having friends adds an additional element to understanding the life course of the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research, it is also important to acknowledge that, at the time of the interviews, none of them were engaged in an intimate relationship. They all viewed the absence of a partner as a negative experience having vested in such a

relationship the potential for intimacy, companionship and care in later life. The older gay men reported continued sexual activity based primarily on opportunistic casual arrangements, although Steven did have a regular sex partner as well. In contrast, none of the women mentioned that they were in contact with sexual partners.

Beyond the generalised desire to have a partner in their life, their commentaries about being single differed to reflect their status as a parent. This is particularly reflected in the importance or otherwise of 'families of choice' or friendship networks. Whilst Heaphy et al. (2003) identify the significance of friendship networks for older lesbians and gay men as mechanisms for support and friendship, they also acknowledge the importance of birth families in such arrangements. Thus older lesbians and gay men draw support from their friends and families reflecting their own circumstances and, in particular, their relationships with their children and their birth families. In this respect, friends and family members afford the potential of a continuum of activities ranging from social interaction and companionship to intimate personal care. Engagement in these activities, in turn, reflects such conditions as the nature and type of the relationship, availability and general proximity of the individuals, their gender and the activities involved.

In projecting their lives forward with the potential of increased levels of morbidity and dependence, the six people who participated in my research again reflected their own circumstances and relationships. Steven placed a great deal of emphasis on friendship relationships as a mechanism that would care for him if the need arose. In contrast, both Ian and Robert made the leap from independence to

dependence based on being at home and being cared for in institutional settings.

Rachel had experienced an extended period of dependence based on her increasingly failing health and was supported by both her son and formal carers.

For Gail her desire was that her children would support her and Janice expressed a desire to be supported by both her family and her friends.

In terms of the intersections between parenthood, being single and the anticipation of increasing morbidity and dependence with age, we see the older lesbians and gay men articulating a complex arrangement or network of support and care. Thus Gail places her emphasis on her daughters for companionship and care, whilst Steven's focus is on identified male members of his friendship network for the provision of intimate care and his broader network for companionship. In contrast to Gail and Steven, both Ian and Robert identify more formal patterns of care, which are located in institutional settings and equally express different expectations of these arrangements, which, in turn, reflect their individual expression of their sexuality. This particular intersection also raises the issue of the symbolic meaning of both being a parent and not being a parent as well as the agency of those upon whom such expectations are placed. Whilst the older lesbians have vested in their adult children their hope that they will be involved in the support of their mother, the adult children in the exercise of their agency may have very different expectations about the care of their mother, not least as a result of their own ageing.

Intersectionality does enable us to establish a broader view of the lives of the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research beyond the dual focus of this thesis - age and sexuality. In this respect, issues of class, ethnicity and

parenthood and relationship status all interface with each other as much as they interface with age and sexuality. The consequence is that we can see, as an example, that the understanding that Janice achieves of being an older lesbian is intertwined with the meaning that she draws from being black, which informs and is informed by her class position. Her understanding of being a mother reflects the enforced estrangement from her children, the origins of which rest in the impact of her sexuality on the outcome of the divorce proceedings. Equally, having grown up in the care system she is a mother who has no experience of having a mother. In later life, not only is she a mother but she is also now a grandmother which is a status afforded to her as a consequence of her relationships with her children but this also is a signifier that she herself is ageing. Inevitably, the meaning that Janice makes of being an older person and a lesbian is both what these expressions of self mean to her but they are also the summation of these other expressions of self which have intertwined through her life to produce the unique self that is Janice. This process is repeated with different combinations and different emphases for each of the people who participated in my research to again produce unique and individual meanings of lives lived.

The rest of this chapter will explore both the constructions of femininity and masculinity through the life course of the women and men that contributed to my research. We need to be aware that these social constructs are not universally fixed or entrenched but rather they are fluid and changing and that such changes have occurred during the life courses of the older lesbians and gay men. This point is articulated by Weeks et al:

'The important point to bear in mind...is that masculinity and femininity are always relational: one can only exist in relationship to the other.'

These relationships inevitably shift over time and over the life course of individuals in particular cultures. But in most societies masculinity and femininity have been organized hierarchically, with masculinity as the unspoken but assumed norm...

(2003:43)

This latter point has significance in terms of the life course and the perception of self for each of the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research. However, it has particular significance in terms of the lives of the older lesbians who have become the embodiment of alternatives to the norm and not just on one issue but, in fact, in three domains of their lives - their sexuality, their gender and now their age. In each of these domains, the older lesbians represent an alternative construct or, as previously discussed in Chapter 6, the site of resistance to the dominant or hegemonic expression of the normative. Thus by the sheer act of being an older lesbian they have resisted the influences of heteronormativity, masculinity and youth centrism.

7.3 The social construction of femininity.

This section of the chapter will focus on the construction of femininity which is a term that is the subject of a much greater level of disputation than the other gendered construct - masculinity. The term femininity in popular usage conjures particular images of softness, nurturing, caring and subservience which become the attributes of a particular expression of being a woman. This imagery is analysed by Ahmed:

The use of metaphors of 'softness' and 'hardness' shows us how

emotions become the attributes of collectives, which get constructed as 'being' through 'feeling'. Such attributes are of course gendered: the soft national body is a feminised body, which is 'penetrated' or 'invaded' by others.'

(2004:2)

These ideas of what constitutes femininity become the site of contestation as feminists seek to challenge both the social construction of femininity and the power relationships that establish one gendered identity as being more powerful than the other. Feminists and feminist theory do not represent a single expression of a particular understanding of the social world, but rather an additional qualifier is required which adds specificity in the approach being adopted, thus '*Marxist, postmodernist, poststructuralist, Foucauldian, psychoanalytic, liberal etc*' (Lovell 1996:310). Returning to the comment made by Weeks et al. (2003,) the idea of a changing construct of femininity finds expression in the stories that particularly Gail and Rachel tell about their earlier lives: both of them engaged in heterosexual relationships and married primarily because these were the dominant norms for relationships and there were few alternatives available to them.

Gail has a very clear understanding of herself in terms of the broader social structures in which she is and was placed. Her sense of self is strongly located within her understanding of the oppression of women in general and, in particular, the women that were part of her earlier life, notably her mother and grandmother. This understanding of herself as a woman precedes the development of her understanding of self as a lesbian by a considerable period. In her narrative, Gail is quite clear that her childhood was on the whole a happy one marred only by the periods when her father was not working away. Her father was a heavy drinker

and consumed a large proportion of the family income. As a result, his behaviour and his relationships with his family were strongly influenced by his drinking and this, in turn ensured that the family struggled to make ends meet. Gail's narrative contains many references to her mother and the position that she was in, given the social climate at the time. Gail comments:

'...she believed that she couldn't abandon him really and there wasn't the choices either - I can remember I was still at junior school and about her making enquiries about renting houses and stuff like that - well they wouldn't let a women have a rented house on their own you had to have a man - and certainly not a single mum with an elderly mother and 5 children - we lived in a council house but she could only get the tenancy transferred if they had a legal separation or a divorce - she couldn't just kick him out and keep the house - and there wasn't income support and stuff like that...'

(Gail 19/2/07)

Here Gail tells of her mother's difficulties and limited choices, which, for Gail, are very clearly situated within the gendered relationships and patriarchal social structures that privileged men over women during that period. Gail talks about the position of women in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, using references that are contemporary to those made by Freidan and her phrase 'the problem that has no name.' The 'problem', as she describes:

'...lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the

United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night - she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question - "is this all?"

(Freidan 1983:13)

Patriarchy in its original sense refers to the power of the patriarch, the father, and in Gail's description of her father this classical definition has considerable resonance. However, Gail is also referring to the social structures that act to restrict women's agentic self whilst privileging hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, and whilst many commentators regard patriarchy as a grand narrative rooted firmly within modernist theoretical constructs, Jagger, commenting on Butler's work, argues that:

'...it must be remembered that although patriarchy as a universal concept and a universal system may well have been displaced in sociological enquiry...feminist accounts of the working of gender relations, sex and sexuality continue to point to hierarchies and asymmetry involved, and continue to structure the lives, bodies, experiences and even psyches of women and the possibilities open to them.'

(Jagger 2008:48)

We can clearly see this dominance in the gendered relationships of Gail's parents as her father exerted direct control of the family's finances and the emotional environment in which they were living. In terms of seeking alternative ways of

living without him, Gail points to how such arrangements were focused on hegemonic heterosexual marital relationships with the result that women could not rent houses or have bank accounts. In Gail's lifetime, women's rights have changed considerably. However, whilst these particular points of control have diminished, this does not necessarily mean that the subjugation of women by men has eased.

The act of reproduction, of having children, is, for Gail, the point at which this oppression has its most extreme expression:

'I think the most liberating thing for women was the pill - I went on the pill after I had Christopher and lots of doctors would prescribe it and they would prescribe it if you were single anyway - but even if you were married lots of doctors wouldn't prescribe it...it just made such a difference - it meant women could have sex lives without being terrified about being pregnant - it gave them choices that they didn't have before and I gave them freedom that they didn't have before and I have heard men say it that if you don't watch out I will get you pregnant again - I will put a stop to your gallivanting and men used - well certainly did use pregnancy as a way of controlling women - keeping them in their place.'

(Gail 19/2/07)

Gail's emerging political awareness of the position of women in society enabled her to both develop an understanding of how patriarchy seeks to ensure the subjection of women beyond reproduction and to take a stance in relation to it. The issue of political lesbianism became fashionable in the 1970s and 80s as some

women rejected relationships with men in favour of sexual relationships with women as an act of solidarity with other women. In referring to the basis and motivation upon which intimate relationships are formed, Gail questions the motives of political lesbians:

'...it's like that question about political lesbians - I think people are deluding themselves and I think it is very unfair on the other person in the relationship is there for any other reason than they love the person that they are with...'

(Gail 30/4/07)

In a broader political sense, Gail articulates her understanding of the oppression of women in economic terms in the following comment:

'...the hard thing for them is the financial bit because generally women's wages are still only 75% of men's wages if you are the poorer women in all the professions you are really going to be poor - you might as well live on social security because you are no better off for working - I mean that has improved a bit with tax credits but what is that about - go out and do 2 jobs instead of 1 - its hard for people for different reasons - I think an awful of women don't realise how strong they are and how much they take on and how much they can do - I think they buy into this business that you have to be part of a couple - and I think that is true in gay relationships as well as straight ones but more pressure on people in straight relationships to have a partner or not to be without one.'

Gail19/3/07

In her narrative, Gail acknowledges an affinity with other women and, as she moved into adulthood, this affinity continued with her forming strong attachments with the women that surrounded her:

'Oh I have always liked other women's company and felt close to other women - I don't think it was every overtly sexual for me - I think perhaps it was more sensual maybe.... talking to them all more important than men - most definitely - but not an obvious sexual attraction - but I think that there was there but I didn't recognise it - it isn't unusual for women - you know women look at women - they are interested in what they wear it's women that watch Miss World not men - it is women who watch it and comment on who's beautiful and it has always been quite okay for girls to be affectionate to each other to hug and to kiss and nobody thinks twice about it if you stop over and share beds and things like that and nobody assumes it is sexual and it isn't - so no my friends - my best friends were more important than [husband] was...'

(Gail 19/2/07)

As she grew older, Gail's affinity with women and her recognition of women's oppression moved into a more overtly political position, as she comments this awareness was raised through her purchase of the magazine 'Spare Rib':

'I suppose the first stuff that I ever read that was more positive would have been in Spare Rib - which wasn't easy to get hold of and I can remember I got a couple where we lived in [place of birth] - I can't

remember which shop I bought it in because W. H. Smith wouldn't stock it at one point - I can't remember where I got hold of that from - but then it - it was the rise of feminism and the promotion of women and their relationships - and all the stuff against the cruise missiles - so all of that stuff was quite high profile really - feminism - listen to all them nowadays you wouldn't have thought had ever happened... I'd probably seen 2 or 3 copies of Spare Rib by the time we had moved up here - I can remember moving up here and working at [place where she moved to] when I was 40 and picking it up in a shop there and them asking me if I wanted it put in a brown paper bag - when I went to the desk to pay for it.'

(Gail 19/3/07)

The emergence of Gail's sexuality is set within the context of a lifelong affinity with women, an understanding of the oppression that women experience and her earlier childhood experiences of being happy in the company of the women in her family, particularly when her father was absent from the family home. For Gail, her sexuality is very much congruent with her political self and her self as a woman. She is acutely aware of the gendered nature of relationships and the differential power that is imbued in such relationships.

For Rachel, marriage was presented as the only alternative living arrangement to that of living with her mother, and as we have seen in Chapter 4:

'I got married when I was 20 - 1958 and I wouldn't have dared leave home - she wouldn't have let me - no I would have dared say I wanted me own place - although I did - dream of me own place until I

thought me only escape from this is to get married.'

(Rachel 24/9/07)

For both Gail and Rachel, hegemonic marital arrangements were the only options available to them and represented, certainly for Rachel, a mechanism of constructing an alternative life. Janice, however, married the first person that had ever said that they loved her and entered a relationship that was regarded as socially acceptable and within which she had children. However, the nature of her earlier life, in particular her abandonment by her mother which she was later to attribute to her ethnicity, resulted in her exploring different aspects of herself in which she employs the metaphor of a journey. Despite recognising herself as black in her teenage years, she describes that her first journey was getting to know what it meant to be a lesbian and that this began when she was working in the city centre pub. Her second journey, which in some respects coincides with her exploration of what it means to be a lesbian, was to explore what it meant to her to be a woman. The third journey, which came later, was to explore her black identity, which she says began at the time that the Motown music scene was emerging in the United Kingdom which was also associated with positive images of black people and the emergence of black pride and black power in the United States. Her last journey she describes as learning to be a black lesbian in which she has brought these different aspects of her identity together. Through all of these journeys, Janice describes that she was also learning what it means to be a mother – the mother that she did not have, the mother she was denied from being to her children because of both the divorce and her husband's move with her children to a different city. She describes how each of these expressions of self were developed separately, the explanation for which she places on the structural

arrangements of society. She acknowledges that she is now embarking on another journey which is about exploring what it means to her to be an older person.

Janice refers to the different components of her self as 'her treasures' and quite clearly values the elements of her identity or the aspects of her identity that marks her difference. In terms of her narrative, her 'treasures' evolved and emerged in the order described above - being a lesbian, being a woman and being black. Here she tells the story of her journey to understand her lesbian self:

'I was in the [armed forces] for 2 years and having relationships with women but it was still - I was still unsure what it meant at a sexuality level only because of how society sort of forms your mental attitude towards your life and women didn't do such things like that...I still went out with boys and I never really felt at ease with and I never totally relaxed in boys company - if I was in a relationship or in a date but I knew I did with women and that was in the early 60s - was it in the early 60s - yes and because - because society had um doctored mi mind I feel - or brainwashed - that was the word that was going round at the time - I was brainwashed into believing that women didn't have relationships with other women - and if you did say that you were a lesbian you were classed as a deviant - you were evil - it was wrong so I never really took on the role in a wholesome way because of what was going down in society I did on a personal intimate level'

(Janice 22/6/07)

Janice's comment is interesting at a number of levels, not least because, whilst she is commenting upon the early expression of her sexuality, this is set within the

context of her being a woman and having to negotiate social values and beliefs and her own feelings. She points to how women were not expected to behave in this manner and that the fact that she did have sexual contact with other women presented for her the embodiment of a contradiction as she undertook activities at the 'personal intimate level' which conflicted with her 'brainwashing'. Janice is referring here to the powerful influences of two broad but interrelated structures that of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity which seek to define what it is to be a woman and to regulate women's behaviour. At this time, Janice was serving in the armed forces where such structures are powerfully felt and articulated. Whilst Janice was managing these dominant hegemonic influences at a personal level, it was not until her husband ascribed to her the label or nomenclature of being a lesbian that she began to recognise this aspect of her identity. As she comments:

'...he [her husband] told me later on in the years - that when he first met me - he told somebody that he fancied me and they said oh - you have got no chance with her - she's a lesbian - and when I heard this it was quite wacky really because I didn't know I was a lesbian because you weren't allowed to be a lesbian - women weren't even allowed to have a sexuality of your own you were just somebody's wife - you know - so your sexuality was purely theirs and when I heard that - somebody saying I was a lesbian - like in me mind it was like a rewind of me life and I had to think back about how I had been with men and women - and it made me aware then - oh yes I have always been a lesbian - and I am not just a lesbian because somebody has told me that I am and I wasn't a lesbian because somebody told me I couldn't be - so doing a rewind made me see where I was being oppressed in me life

and in me behaviour...'

(Janice 22/6/07)

Following this ascription of a label which gave her a name for her sexual self, Janice describes how she now had the vehicle that would allow her to understand why she felt so unhappy in her marriage. In the period following this, she started going to gay clubs in the city in which she was living, which were geographically situated alongside black clubs and she began to have a presence in both. In the black clubs that she visited, Janice was recognised as both black and a lesbian and this began the process for her of exploring what it meant to be black. Her exploration was set in the context of racism and reassessing her earlier experiences of people's reactions to her as a black person. In exploring her earlier years, racism becomes the explanation for why she was rejected by her mother and why she was brought up in a children's home:

'I was born and then I think cause I am mixed race the black issue came into play very strongly apart from those days - 43 when I was born - if a woman had illegitimate kids there were seen being evil and not right and some were even put into institutions - for having a child out of wedlock - so all that was going on but I think the black issue played an important part as to why I wasn't brought up in the family of me mum and me dad.'

(Janice 22/6/07)

She continues:

'When I was 13 I was fostered out - to a white family in [place] cause I

am mixed race - and I look black and I was there for 4 years – I was reasonably happy - as far as being a child is concerned but I was really aware that um - I was different - different in the way of me colour - visually - different in the way of a culture - that I couldn't really gel with because I wanted something different and when I was 13 - well before I was 13 and in the children's home - I can remember being attracted to girls then and having really strong feelings for them but not knowing what it meant or what to do so nothing happened - and then when I got fostered out I became even more aware of how I felt sexually towards other young women and um - I had relationships with girls but really any deep involvement but mainly because I wasn't aware I was different in me sexuality - and part of me wasn't sure if my attraction to young women was might have been because I never had a mother figure in me life...'

(Janice 22/6/07)

This exploration of her black identity draws attention to other experiences of racism as she was growing up:

'There was also an issue for me on account that there was a lot of racism I wasn't - educationally aware of it being racism about how it was treated because there was different things that I go for or in the way of jobs or even friendships and I'd get denied it or turned away - and I just thought it was hem just not liking me and it was only when I got older that I realised that it was racism - I was experiencing racism and I got to understand what racism was - I was aware that who feels it knows it - is that kind of feeling that you get when you know what

something is because you have experienced it for so long that you have seen - the other side of it - you know it happens to you but it doesn't happen to white people and at the same time in the 60's - it was a really exciting and adventurous but at the same time - it was a fearful time as well - because I was growing up and becoming someone who was - who I didn't really want to become because I was so restricted - in a lot of ways and at the time the idea was you left school as a woman - you left school - you worked for a few years - and then you got married - you became somebody's wife - you have children - you became somebody's mother - so you never really had a personal identity as a woman - and that was when I was really aware - cause I got married and had kids...'

(Janice 22/6/07)

Janice is describing the interface of two monoliths - sexism and racism - and how they were made manifest in her lived experience as a black woman. The constituent elements of the self that Janice refers to as 'her treasures' have been the subject of considerable contestation. Lovell (1996) argues that feminism has been critically reviewed as an analysis of the position and experiences of white middle class women. In a similar manner, commentators on race have been accused of not recognising the position of black women, further reinforcing the 'invisibility' of black women which is reflected in Healey's (1994) comment cited in Chapter 2. Whilst the interface between race and gender has been subject to contestation, Janice has been living and experiencing what it means to be a black woman. Initially, the meanings of these aspects of self for Janice were explored separately, but more recently she has found a synergy between these elements which enables her to view herself as a complete whole. This synergy finds its

expression for Janice in her ability to talk to and understand the position of young black men whilst receiving from them an intrinsic respect based on their understanding that she is a black lesbian. Janice makes the following commentary on her journey of discovering her treasures:

'Racism is usually first and foremost I think - it's usually a visual thing cause if you look a different colour that's when the racism is thrown at you - so that's been the longest - being a woman's taken a long time and feeling confident about that because of different experiences I went through because I was a woman and being a gay woman again a lot of experiences I had because I chose to love other women and all the compromises that I have had to come through - I don't want to fit into society because I feel dead happy being who I am which is black gay female and elder and an elder and I don't want to fit in anywhere because all of it is together in me - I don't want to fit into them separate compartments like that because they are all in me and that's who I am as a whole and somebody mentions in that film about you know being gay - there's been so much media representing us on a sexual level - you know - that I want to be thought of intelligently and you know what I can do not who - what I do in bed and who I do it with - so all these people who are homophobes - it's like get your head out of our knickers will you - you know there is the rest of our bodies our minds doing things never mind our sexuality even though it is important because that does separate us from the heterosexuals but it only separates us in so much as who we chose to love but the heterosexual community has given birth to us so we are not at war with them or anything we are opposed to them or anything because if it wasn't for

the heterosexuals society we wouldn't be here but it is them who are opposed to us living our lives differently to them which is the argument.'

(Janice 22/707)

Gail, Rachel and Janice have, through their narratives, maintained a clear sense of themselves as women and women who are attracted to other women. They are articulating how they have, through their life courses, stood apart from the hegemonic expressions of normative modes of life. In standing apart and in being 'other', all three women have had to negotiate their own understanding of what it means to be a lesbian having, unlike the men, previously adopted and acted upon a self that conformed to normative expectations of sexuality. This process of self-making has been significantly informed by their own understanding of what it means to be a woman. Janice, in her making of self, also had the additional element of her racial background and necessarily had to negotiate her meaning of self within the context of the two hegemonic expressions of patriarchy and racism. Their sheer act of 'being' represents sites of resistance in that they clearly identify themselves as women, lesbians and now older people.

7.4 The social construction of masculinity

Moynihan (1998) offers a very good outline of the signifiers of gendered stereotypes in which masculinity is thought to comprise, amongst others, the following characteristics:

- Inexpressive.
- Aggressive.
- Ambitious.

- Analytical.
- Successful.
- Invulnerable.

In contrast, femininity is characterised as having the following signifiers:

- Emotional.
- Expressive.
- Compassionate.
- Gentle.
- Sensitive.
- Warm.

Whilst these characteristics are regarded as stereotypical, they do become influential both in their use to set an ideal or to measure a perceived deficiency and also in the resonance that they have in everyday life. For Ian, Robert and Steven, their expressions in their narratives of their gendered selves are very much less explicit than those of the older lesbians and reflect Ahmed's view:

'Normativity is comfortable for those who can inhabit it. The word 'comfort' suggests wellbeing and satisfaction, but it also suggests an ease and easiness. To follow the rules of [hegemonic masculinity] is to be at ease in a world that reflects back the...form one inhabits as an ideal.'

(Ahmed 2004:147)

In the passage from Ahmed, I have changed her reference to heteronormativity and substituted the phrase 'hegemonic masculinity' in order to make the point that as men, older gay men do not need to demonstrate, exercise or exert their gendered selves simply because they occupy the dominant gender position.

Unlike the women, the narratives of the three men do not contain specific gendered references to themselves which is not surprising given that they are the embodied representation of the hegemonic form and, as such, their gendered position does not require explanation. However, such an argument assumes that masculinity is one expression of the normative and that a man is a man. Whilst Ian, Robert and Steven may receive some 'ease' from occupying this normative and hegemonic space they will also experience 'unease' because they are not the manifestation of the other hegemonic condition, namely heterosexual. In their narratives, we can see the disjuncture between hegemonic masculinity and gay male sexuality.

Connell (2001) states that, whilst all men achieve a gain from the expressions of hegemonic masculinity which represent the subordination of women, very few men actually achieve the ideal construct of masculinity which, in turn, gives rise to the idea of masculinities articulated by Gutterman (2001). Connell argues:

'Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity...hence...gayness is easily assimilated to femininity...and hence - in the view of some gay theorists - the ferocity of homophobic attacks.'

(2001:40)

This hierarchical structuring of masculinities is visible in Herek's (2002) research which focused on the reaction to both lesbians and gay men by heterosexuals. Herek identifies a distinction between heterosexual men's and women's attitudes towards lesbians and gay men with heterosexual men's reaction to gay men being significantly more negative than their response to lesbians. This reaction was, in part, based on the perception that gay men were the manifestation of a distorted gender image in that they were not true men. Connell's (2001) and Gutterman's (2001) identification of a hierarchical diversity of expressions of masculinities and the subsequent reaction to those expressions of masculinity is highlighted by Steven and Ian in their narratives about their experiences of reactions to their sexuality and to other gay men. Steven's political sense of himself is expressed both in terms of the decision he made to declare his sexuality at his place of work in the early 1970s, shortly after the decriminalisation of gay male sex in the late 1960s, and is also situated in his decision to become a member of CHE (Campaign for Homosexual Equality). His disclosure of his sexuality took place within an employment environment that was somewhat conservative in respect of their employees' sexuality. Steven explains some of his rationale for that decision as follows:

'I was fed up of pretending - looking over my shoulder all the time - I had always - as a member of the church and trying to live by Christian principles I always believed that what you see is what you get if you are a Christian - anybody with any honesty or religion or ethos about you - what you see should be what you get and I always had tried - what I was at [work people] should see what the people at the church see when I go to church and when I was preaching the people - I would be

preaching at Methodist churches in the area - and there would be some [people from work] there from my school probably cause the families went to those churches and what they saw in the pulpit should be more or less what they saw at [work] and my friends as well and my family - I do believe that - that honest way of living and it is not to do with Christian or religious people aren't necessarily the only people like that - anybody can be like that and lots of people are like that - watertight compartments of your life causes problems and it leads to paranoia I think.'

(Steven 27/9/06)

Steven takes a particular religious ethos as the underpinning of his personal and political stance and it is interesting that many expressions of that religion currently express openly hostile views towards same sex relationships and, in particular, gay male relationships. However, for Steven, his religious beliefs meant that he had to be honest in his dealings with other people and this meant being honest in respect of his sexuality. Whilst Steven locates his decision to come out at work in terms of his religious beliefs, he also admits that he never actually came out to his parents, although he is clear that he never deceived them in terms of pretending to have an interest in women.

The actual context of his decision to come out at work rests with his membership of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE). As a result of this, he was a nominated contact in the town where he lived which meant that his contact details were regularly published in the national newspaper, 'Gay News'. This was noted by somebody at his place of work who approached stating that she thought it was fantastic that there was somebody who was gay at this place of employment.

Having been noted at work by one person, Steven describes the moment of the decision to come out at work:

'...it was a discussion in the staffroom about - oh I can't remember what it was now - to do with the police and the police numbers and the discussion ranged around car crime or something like that - police figures criminal figures and I cited what we already knew cause I was heavily involved in campaigning and at least once a month I was in London or Manchester or Birmingham or Liverpool or wherever on some sort of national conference about something or other and I was getting involved with other political issues - anti-racism - um and some of the members of these meeting or conferences were high up in politics in various parties and in government so you got to know things before the general public knew about them at times - and we knew then and I think it is similar now that towards the end of the month police figures for crime detection rate and solving have to be returned and there were two areas where it was easy to knock the figures up and that was car crime ie tax disc or bald tyres or cottaging - they are crimes that are not reported so it is a 100% solving so - if you have 2 burglaries and a murder not solved in your patch go out and do ten cars and 20 cottages and suddenly your crime percentages rocket doesn't it - and I was quoting that and the conversation went on - and I said it's not right - they are not real crimes they are - some of these people in cottages - cause we then went to talk about toilets - and men in toilets doing things and it's disgusting and I said come on these are real people - gay people aren't like that - you should judge people who are gay by that definition - they are alright - think of the gay people you know I said - I don't know any -

yes you do you know me...

(Steven 27/9/06)

The repercussions were almost immediate as his work colleagues became split in either support or opposition to him:

'....that was a cat amongst the flock of pigeons that was - and within the week I was hauled before the [senior manager] - who wanted me out of that [place of work] and out of the profession um - but it didn't develop like that - 2 years later [there was] a very different view of where he wanted me to go - cause for one thing the union kicked in - and um - I eventually had a visit from the [very senior manager] who I didn't know at the time but subsequently learned from others was gay anyway - so I then lead a sort of protected life.'

(Steven 27/9/2006)

The difficulty that his employers had in respect of his statement was the manner in which it had been made. Steven had volunteered this information and was not forced into this position by some expression of criminal activity which would have been a disciplinary matter and would have resulted in him being sacked:

'I had come out you see without - it wasn't a court case in the paper - I was the first person in the county - whether I was the first person in the country - but I was the first person in the county to be out by choice not because of a pending court case for cottaging...hadn't been outed I had chosen - there was not discipline over a fine or imprisonment - or anything - so there was nothing like that had gone on and that was novel

it was new to them.'

(Steven 27/9/2006)

Whilst Steven is describing a somewhat ambiguous reaction to his sexual identity at work and being 'protected' by a very senior manager, his career did significantly stall at this time as he was moved from place to place until he took early retirement in his mid 50s:

'...when I was 54 - 14 years ago they gave me early retirement so I have been retired from [work] for 14 years now so I was relatively young when I retired I was determined to be a statistic that Thatcher said didn't exist - so I signed on every fortnight I got out of bed - every fortnight on a Tuesday - early enough to go to sign on - I had gone into a decline at the time - I was really quite depressed when I think about it - and I was entitled to draw benefit because I had been made redundant - and the law was that you could draw it for 6 months or until you were 55 whichever came sooner.'

(Steven 7/8/06)

The expression of Ian's sense of his political self within his narratives assumes both structural and personal dimensions in that he has a clear sense of himself as a gay man and this becomes the manifestation of his personal political self. However, Ian's chosen career, the armed forces, did place severe restrictions upon his public identity as he made the decision that being in the forces was very important to him. As a consequence, whilst Ian was in the armed forces he was subject to both the criminal sanction that every gay man was subjected to prior to 1967 and to military regulations which made being a gay man incompatible with

military service. Throughout this period of his life Ian, lived a delicate balance, engaging in sexual relationships with other men, whilst ensuring that he was not even suspected of being a gay man. At a personal level, Ian was aware of the consequences of being suspected of being a gay man:

'...you only had to be thought to be - you know - sort of - a rumour that you might be queer - bent - different - as the words that could be used - for investigation - I mean I had friends that were put on the therapy treatment - you know aversion therapy - yes - part of our history - one of those things - but I had guardian angel on my left shoulder - I don't know who was on my right but it must have been someone equally as good - I never got clobbered...

(Ian 31/5/05)

In managing this tension, Ian employed a number of 'distraction' techniques the most significant of which was his engagement with, and success at, long-distance running. This activity both distracted attention away from his sexuality based on the generalised belief that athletes were 'real' men and therefore he could not possibly be gay and ensured that he was perceived to be too busy to engage in any intimate relationship, whilst enabling him to access the high powered group who were based in London. Ian is very proud of the fact that he was never 'caught' undertaking same sex activities and, as stated above, the corner of his papers were not cut. The other issue for Ian was that, if he had been dishonourably discharged, then he would also have lost access to his pension which contributes to his finances now in later life. As Ian moved away from the influence of military regulations, he became more relaxed in respect of his sexuality and engaged in a twenty year relationship with a man and, in a variety of instances, asserted his

sexuality in public settings. Ian provides two examples of both his confidence in the public proclamation of his sexuality and in acting in resistance to heteronormativity:

We [partner] had the same GP before we met each other we had the same GP and we still had the same GP after- we movedand he knew we was in an homosexual relationship as he had it on his - a stable relationship - they were in a stable relationship if you are filling forms in as you do at times...anyway [partner] got a liver disease - it wasn't hepatitis - the GP knew I had had that and as soon as [partner] got it he hurtled me away to have a test to see if I had had a reoccurrence of anything and then at the end of it [partner] had to have another test and he said - we will have the results on such a day and just come in a get it - so we said right the doctor - the GP wasn't there and the receptionist said unfortunately you are going to have to see one of the doctors to get the result - which one it doesn't matter - so she said right oh - it won't take long I will fit you in - so I went in to see him - I don't know... so I said have come in for the result of [partner's] blood test I was told it would be ready today to be collected - he said and who are you - so I said I'm [name] partner - what do you mean his partner - I said I'm [name] partner we are a same sex couple - you know I'm his next of kin whatever you want to call it - he said no such thing as same sex couple - don't believe in it - I am not giving it to you - well I'll not tell you what I said - and I didn't say it in English so I don't think he understood it either - I can swear in Spanish - so I stormed out and Maureen the secretary and I knew her she was the friend of a friend - what's the matter Ian I said that - and I pointed - refused to

give it to me - the result cause he doesn't believe in such things as same sex partnerships...'

(Ian 20/6/05)

In this story, Ian is publicly proclaiming his own sexuality through the declaration of his relationship with another man and, in doing so, he had experienced both a homophobic and a heteronormative reaction to him. In the second example, Ian describes an event that occurred amongst a group of friends at his employer's social club:

'...and I was accepted into a group of husbands and wives you know - I didn't have a female with me - they would have dances and things like that - in the gang... I stopped hiding in the fact that I wasn't - there was one or two of the females that tried matching with - elderly widow, middle aged widow - divorcees - but we - one of the guys said - his wife was there - he said you know you are wasting you time with Ian - he's not interested in women - he's a good looking man this was her words - he a good looking guy he must be interested in women - he said he's not - if you find him a nice boyfriend he will be alright - [name] told me this I said how do you know - shut up he said if someone asked me straight up I would say that he prefers men than women - you know - I would say it out loud cause he said I don't think you would worry - I said no and don't I make it that obvious - he said no he said you look at men not women - and he was a very observant character and anybody who is observant - you know - a couple you've not seen before normally the women look at the men and the men look at the women - you know - weigh them up that type of thing - it was the fellas that I looked at...'

In both Ian and Steven's narratives, we can see the effect of this hierarchy of masculinities as both of them experienced the negative reaction to their gay male sexuality and, whilst they were men who were privileged in relation to women, they were not privileged in relation to other men. In terms of the construction of masculinity, I have focused on the relationships between expressions of masculinity. For Robert, his concern about the reaction to his sexuality is much more personally focused as he was concerned about how his mother would respond to him. Robert's concern establishes an interesting further dynamic which, as Weeks et al. (2003) comment above suggests, situates the expression of gender within a relational context namely the relationships between the genders.

7.5 Stories of intersecting genders.

As we have seen, within the narratives there is a distinction in the presentation of the gendered self between the men who, on the whole, make no assertion of themselves as men, and the older lesbians who assert their gendered difference through reference to themselves as women. However, when it comes to relationships between the genders, the position is reversed. The references to women in the narratives of the men are on the whole made within the context of reflecting on their future and the potential of their failing health, increased dependence and the need for care. These references clearly reflect gendered stereotypes and become part of the patriarchal discourse of women's oppression, based on the assumption that women undertake caring roles because caring is an intrinsic characteristic of being a woman. The association between women and caring, where the latter is perceived to be both an emotion and an activity, has a

considerable legacy within feminist analyses of the family which is illustrated by Thomas (1993) who identifies the social identity of carers within gendered terms and specifically as women, although Fisher (1994) contradicts such gendered stereotypes with the acknowledgement of men as carers. However, the gendered nature of the debate about carers develops as gendered analyses explore who undertakes different care tasks and how much care is given in terms of time, concluding that caring remains a role predominantly undertaken by women. These specific references also contain other subtle, and not so subtle, nuances as they place conditions on the involvement of women in their care. After the death of his mother, Robert adopts an almost separatist agenda:

'I specifically said other males - I didn't want females on the boat... oh it was male company - not necessarily sexual - just male company - um I didn't - I just didn't want women on the boat - I felt and still do feel much more comfortable in male company and I do in female company - I don't seek out female company of any sort - um - I tend to keep women at arm's length if I can - but obviously - one has to meet people socially...'

(Robert 3/10/05)

When asked about care and in particular residential care, Robert is clear that, if necessary, he would prefer to be cared for in a gay residential setting, and by young men:

'oh yes if there was one - oh yes - but I don't think they exist do they - given the choice I would prefer that...what would be even better (laughing) is being looked after by a nice young - well it wouldn't be

terribly important whether they were gay or not but it is always nice if they were good looking young men...'

(Robert 3/10/05)

Steven's narrative is very critical of the existing structural arrangements for the care of older people and, as part of this critique, he is particularly critical of women as carers in these settings, as he comments:

'...the other issue of course is that these intimacies performed by professional strangers who assume you are heterosexual - or whose professional behaviour conditions them to be assuming that you heterosexual and ignoring your gay things - all these intimacies - I would not be particularly comfortable with women performing intimacies on my body - not while I am conscious...'

(Steven 4/9/06)

In a similar manner to Robert, he expresses a preference about the gender of those who care for him:

'I have a sneaking suspicion that when it came to it I would much prefer a bloke who is comfortable with gay men - if he is not gay himself - performing the wipe your bum, sponge your balls move the smegma or whatever you know - when they come to do the smeg off session I am not happy with nurses because I have heard women nurses talking about men's bits - some of them lesbians and I don't like that - if I was unconscious who cares - except that when you come to and you see people giving you those wicked smiles when they pass you that can be worrying I

suppose and that is why I was seeing my growing older as a gay man and my personal identity - dignities - because in some ways you begin to loose your identity don't you - that is part of the loss of dignity - when you lose your identity it is a loss of dignity - it is part of the same package you are just a number - 4th bed down needs his toenails cutting.'

(Steven 4/9/06)

Ian's position in respect of gender and care giving is much more ambivalent, as his focus is on the quality of the care, recognition of his sexuality and the maintenance of his dignity:

'Whether it is male nurse who is doing something to you or a female nurse - I don't give a damn - they are doing a job - I am a product on their production line type thing - I am quite happy with that situation - if there were any problems - if I felt I was being treated different cause of my sexuality then I would be anti - but I have never had and I don't expect it.'

(Ian 6/7/05)

Interestingly, there are no pejorative, separatist or negative references to men in general in the narratives of the older lesbians. However, their narratives do contain specific references to individual men who have featured in their lives, most notably their husbands. Both Gail and Janice experienced levels of violence directed towards them at the point at which their marriages were ending, which also coincided with their acknowledgment of their attraction to women, although it is very difficult to establish whether the violence they experienced was targeted at them as women or as lesbians. Rachel's experience of the end of her marriage is

very different which has given rise to a lifelong fondness of her husband. Janice does make reference to her positive engagement with younger black men with whom she feels that she has a good relationship. However, Rachel's work as a sadomasochistic prostitute did involve ritual violence on her part directed to the men who were paying her to adopt this role. The immediate family circumstances of the three older lesbians are very different than that of the older gay men which has the result that the three older lesbians routinely come into contact with men because each have male children and grandchildren.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has primarily focused on the constructs of femininity and masculinity and how these are made manifest in the lives of the older lesbians and gay men. However, in the making of the self, such constructs do not exist in isolation and are in turn influenced by the intersection of other expressions of the self. Thus as women and men their lives have been and continue to be effected by such factors as their class position, their race and ethnicity, whether they are parents or not and their relationships with others.

It is not surprising that the expression of their gendered selves varies between the men and the women. We have seen that the women's sense of themselves is very much as women and, with this comes a political affinity with other women. Each of the older lesbians who participated in my research experienced very significant dislocations in the trajectories of their lives associated with the acknowledgement of their sexuality and their rejection of hegemonic heteronormative relationships. However, at the point in their lives when they were experiencing these dislocations they were also mothers and as a consequence of their sexuality their status

changed as they became lesbian mothers which, was at the time, the subject of much political and social vilification. Such was the hostility towards lesbian mothers that each of them faced losing parental access to their children, which is, in fact, what happened to Janice. At this time of their lives, the older lesbians were experiencing the break up of their heterosexual relationships, exploring their sexuality, adjusting to their changed social status as lesbians with the very real prospect of losing access to their children.

On the other hand, occupying the space of the hegemonic, the expression of the male gendered self is not articulated with the same sense of the clarity that the women employ. However, within the men's narratives there is a very real sense of the distinction between men and the creation of masculinities in which they are measured as deficient; as not being real men. With the exception of Steven, who was forced into early retirement because of his sexuality, the older gay men's lives followed a linear trajectory. They had good jobs and were able to contribute to their pension arrangements for extensive periods. They also did not experience the emotional and financial dislocation that can accompany divorce with the consequence that they moved into late life with very good pensions and are financially in a better position than the older lesbians. However, through most of their adult lives the men lived with the threat of 'discovery' and with this the social and legal responses to their sexuality.

Both the men and the women are clear in their understanding of themselves and their gender, although, when we add the additional component of heteronormativity to the gendered self, they are equally clear that they are lesbians or gay men. In this respect, we see the continued articulation of the theme of resistance and separation that emerged in the previous chapter,

although, within the context of the gendered self, this is focused around stereotypical gendered identity or the constructs that are femininity and masculinity. In general terms this is the articulation of a separation based both on these constructs but also upon the additional component of heteronormativity. For the men, this separation can be characterised through the intersection of heteronormativity and a hierarchical construction of masculinity. Thus the articulation of the 'real' gendered male self is achieved through this intersection and may be expressed as 'we are not men' but 'we are men who are gay'. The intersection of both hierarchically constructed and perceived normative expressions of gender and sexuality have equal implications for the women. Thus when Janice says 'I am a lesbian' she is making a clear statement about herself and her relationship with the normative. However, this comment also has implications for the intersection of other expressions of the self, thus when she asserts her sexuality she does so as a black woman and presents herself as a black lesbian. Less explicitly is the fact that she is a mother. The result is that these different expressions and experiences of self add layers of complexity to the statement 'I am a lesbian.' The assertion of sexuality in this manner not only presents challenges to the constructs of gender and sexuality, they also present challenges to other hegemonic discourses. As a lesbian mother, Janice, also challenges the dominant image of who should be a parent and being a black lesbian confronts racial and ethnic ideas of normative relationships as well as same sex attraction

In the next chapter, I will explore the discourses of ageing but there is, of course, a considerable interface between the gendered self and the stereotypes of older people, thus older women become invisible and older men become 'perverts' and both become 'grumpy'. The interface between gender and age has very real

consequences when we consider the effects that ageing has on physiology, not least when we consider differential mortality rates which mean that, in general, men die younger than women. Healey (1994) cited in Chapter 2, provides another example of the interface between gender and age when she states that as an older woman and an older lesbian she is invisible. Arber and Ginn (1995) identify that the invisibility of older women is pervasive and is also reflected within a number of different domains notably interpersonal relationships, the labour market and social policy.

In performing gender, the older lesbians and gay men, because of their sexuality, are again engaged in negotiating the meaning of being men or women who are sexually attracted to the same sex within the context of normative expressions of gender that do not easily accept such attraction. The consequence is that individually they have constructed this meaning in the making of the self. However, as these processes of negotiation and the making of self are undertaken individually, it is interesting that there are considerable expressions of similarity in their performance of gender. This, of course, reflects my comment in the previous chapter which acknowledges that the negotiation and making of self are processes that are themselves set within normative contexts and are within bounded constructs. Thus, in making sense of themselves as gendered beings who are attracted to people of the same gender, they are influenced by the norms of the presentation of that gender and, importantly, by their own construction of the gender to which they are attracted.

The next chapter explores how the older lesbians and gay men as gendered sexualised selves give meaning to being older people. This is particularly important given that the stereotypical image of older people denies sexuality and

ascribes an asexual status, based on a broad understanding that the object of desire is the young body with an implied rejection of the potential that the older person could be sexually desirable.

Chapter 8 - Themes: The ageing self

8.1 Introduction

'Die early or grow old: there is no alternative. And yet as Goethe said, 'Age takes hold of us by surprise.' For himself each man[sic] is the sole, unique subject, and we are often astonished when the common fate becomes our own... when we are grown up we hardly think about our age any more: we feel that the notion does not apply to us; for it is one that assumes we look backwards towards the past and draw a line under the total, whereas in fact we are reaching out towards the future, gliding on imperceptibly from day to day, from year to year. Old age is particularly difficult to assume because we have always regarded it as something alien, a foreign species: 'Can I have become a different being while I still remain myself?...'

(de Beauvoir 1972, cited in Moody 2000:420)

In this passage, de Beauvoir paints a picture of both the images and the ideas that are associated with age and ageing. She speaks of the contradictions and complications that are attributed to growing older. She identifies the inevitability of ageing. Yet, as she acknowledges, it comes as a shock to us. The process is transformational, so much so that we become almost an alien or a foreign species yet we remain ourselves; she argues that we think that ageing doesn't apply to us and, as a result, we do not think about it but ageing is in our consciousness and is synergistically linked to looking backwards, at looking at our lives and how we have lived. Yet in doing this, in looking backwards we are reaching out to our future because our future is intrinsically linked to our ageing and our past.

In drawing our attention to the complexities, tensions, nuances and complications that are associated with ageing and growing older, de Beauvoir is highlighting how later life is both individually and collectively experienced. Thus it is the old collectively and individually that experience ageing, but it is also younger people who share these issues through their relationships with older people and of course as a consequence of their own ageing. In the same way that being lesbian or gay or being a man or a woman is not an expression of a single identity, being old is also not a single identity. Thus, as she states, our future is about our past and our past lives are about our present lives with the result that who we are now and who we will be is a reflection of who we have been.

For older lesbians and gay men, this inevitably means recognising the meaning that they have attached to their sexuality in their earlier lives. In a process of self-making the importance is how that sense of their sexual self fits with their understanding and experience of what it means to be an older lesbian or gay man and whether the processes of negotiation and self-making continue into their later life. De Beauvoir suggests that being older has an apparently transformational quality when she asks '*Can I have become a different being while I still remain myself?*' Here we see the articulation of separation, of somehow being different, whilst, contradictorily, at the same time, the same person and there arises from this the question about what this means to the individual.

This chapter explores the narratives of the older lesbians and gay men and the themes that are related to their stories of what growing older has meant to them. In a similar manner to de Beauvoir's account of growing older, these stories contain many contradictions and complications, similarities and differences and accounts

of resistance and separation. Separation has been a theme articulated in the previous two chapters and has mainly focused on the issue of sexuality. However, the focus shifts in the stories of the older lesbians and gay men about being older to construct a separation related to age. This expression of separation is focused upon the devices employed by older people that facilitate their dissociation from their peers and which are employed by the older lesbians and gay men in a similar manner, but with the additional component of sexuality. However, whilst these devices are visible within the narratives, it is also clear that, as individuals, they are negotiating the meaning of being older, with the result that there are many tensions and contradictions within their stories. Heaphy et al. (2003) discovered in their research that older lesbians and gay men attach the same ideas of fluidity and context-dependency to the meaning of ageing that are adopted by heterosexual older people. This adds another layer of complication to our understanding of ageing within a lesbian and gay context, namely the areas of synergy and difference; universalism and particularism that have their origins in the experiences of the sexual self and the self as 'other'.

In any discussion related to being an older person, there is a tendency to view later life as one aspect of life experienced by all. This homogenising effect is broadly ageist because it is based on the assumption that older people are fundamentally similar and that the defining characteristic is their age. However, such an approach denies the intrinsic diversity of older people, who, like any other group of people, differ significantly in their characteristics. As a demographic category, the group of people who are regarded as older can have some fifty years difference in their life span and may have significant differences in their wealth, health, cultural backgrounds and of, particular interest for this thesis, their sexuality. The inevitable difficulty is the movement from the particular to the

general and, vice versa, from assuming that because an issue is important in one person's life that it is important to every older person.

Growing older is conventionally regarded as a negative experience, wrapped in ideas of personal and group decline, decay and death. These images are very powerful and form the basis of the negativity which is directed towards older people, and which are invariably articulated as elements of ageism. Death and illness are features of life, irrespective of age, and can occur at any point in the lifespan, although in Western societies such events are increasingly situated in later life. The reality is that, in exploring issues related to perceptions of what it means to be an older person, death and illness will be part of that story or narrative.

The negative perceptions of what it means to be an older person are persistently associated with ageism which has been seminally defined by Butler:

'Ageism can be seen as a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this for skin colour and gender. Old people are categorized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, old fashioned in morality and skills...Ageism allows younger generations to see older people as different from themselves, thus subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings.'

(Butler 1975:12)

Whilst Butler was the first person to define ageism as a concept in the manner in which it is presented above, it is inherently problematic not least because it

assumes a unidirectional process: thus it is the young that discriminate against the old. This, of course, ignores the fact that old people can and do discriminate against both younger people and their peers. However, other aspects of this definition do raise powerful issues about the manner in which older people in general are treated and regarded by others.

8.2 Growing old as a negative experience

In reflecting on ageing in general and on their own ageing in particular, the views of the older lesbians and gay men are complex as they articulate both negative and positive ascriptions to ageing and being an older person. In this respect, their views about later life which reflect those of the broader population and are exemplified by Janice:

'...it's an inconvenience because 64 sounds like an auld woman and you know and on paper I can't imagine how people think of me whereas - you know in reality I feel dead fit - well I am dead fit and I feel it as well - in a general sense and especially because of me age - I still work...'
(Janice 22/7/07)

In this comment, Janice associates her chronological age with a socially constructed image of older women from which she draws a great deal of negativity, but she then contradicts this image with her own personal feelings of being a sixty four year old woman as she feels 'dead fit'. Implicitly, the distinction that Janice is drawing suggests she should not feel, based on her age, as well as she clearly does. This negative association of ageing continues in her narrative as she describes engaging with different groups of older people. Specifically, she

makes reference to being part of a group called '55+' which meets to explore issues related to older lesbians and gay men. She notes that there is no representation from black people and, in spite of her own mixed race identity, she views herself as representing the 'elderly'. In discussing this group she is critical of the older people and dissociates herself from the images that she feels they project:

'55+ it was like - it was all men they were all men who looked like the stereotype old age pensioners - they were very - from different things they were saying and their attitudes like that - sounds like they were very burnt out from the gauntlet that gay people have had to run for the last 40- 50 years even though when it became legal you still had to run the gauntlet like to stay who you were to come out and stand up for yourself - so these people who were there I was really aware had gone with the flow of society and seen their lives as such and only being as much as society allowed them to be - which okay that's their bag it's not my bag - so when the guy who's running it was talking about different things and that and I was like on top of it all - these are retired and potter around in the garden and go walks and that and I was like I make films and I have just made one about being black and gay and all that one and you know I could see them sparking off and interested like and then the guy that was sort of co-ordinating it like was made up... anyway but I felt exhausted when I came away from there because it is like - well I am questioning myself now - do I want to go to all these - now I don't mean anything racist in this - but all these white run new groups that are happening in order to access funds to pull down funds from wherever they are coming from to make that particular group's

lives happier - and all that one and yeah it's great that it is happening for them but I want to do for my - for people like me - for people who have experienced racism as well as homophobia.'

(Janice 22/7/07)

In her description of this group, Janice presents the other older people in stereotypically negative terms, whilst presenting herself somewhat heroically as shaking them out of their malaise by seeing herself as an alternative and vibrant image of ageing. Janice is also recognising other differences between herself and the other older people who are part of this group with these differences being situated within race and gender. Thus the other members of the group are all white men, however, rather than situating the differences between them within race and gender she focuses in her narrative on different presentations of self as older people.

Jones (2006), who employed discursive analysis within a framework of Positioning Theory (Davies and Harre 1990; Harre and Langenhove 1999) to explore the content and meaning of older people's language about growing older, highlights an important factor in older people's narratives which is the employment of language devices which separate the individual older person from other older people. In identifying the range of these devices, Jones points to the act of denying age or ageing which, she argues, is an inherently realist position given that the individual has a real and definite chronological age which is being denied. In Janice's comment above, she separates or positions her own reality from the stereotypical image of older women in particular and older people in general, by asserting that she is 'dead fit'. Janice distinguishes herself forcefully from her chronological age and its associated set of negative images. In denying her age, Janice employs

varying age related reference points as she changes her expressed chronological age to meet the circumstances of the particular exchange in which she is engaged:

'I thought oh here's that one that always pulls me age out and at the end of it she had these people and introduced me and goes guess how old she is go on - and she was like in my face going tell them how old you are - and it was like oh here you are again so I said I'm 43 actually - these are the situations when I am going to knock off - and she oh no stop messing go on tell them - and I said I've just told them I am 43 and it was that one and I done that in a pub with some gay man who's put me on that spot and introduced his friends who I have never met in my life before - here you are here's Janice and she 63 you know... I went no he's a liar I'm not that old at all.'

(Janice 22/7/07)

Jones' work would suggest that Janice is in fact denying her age and thereby dissociating herself from other older people. However, an alternative explanation for Janice's comment would involve understanding that she has frequently experienced her friends commenting on the disjuncture between her chronological age and her appearance and has decided to manage how the information about her age is given and, in doing so, is managing her presentation of self. These alternative understandings of Janice's comment highlight the subtle nuances that are involved in understanding the meaning of older people's narratives.

Somewhat less overtly than Janice, Ian claims that:

'The age bit is a misnomer - it's not I have lived for 75 years - I have 75 years experience - as I say when people ask me how old are you - I say I am 35 with 75 years experience or something like that - depending on how flippant I am being - somewhere between 35 and 49 but I always quickly add with 75 years experience - and I think that this is the thing - I don't think I was ever middle aged - not in - the accepted sense - um - I used to get clobbered for wearing tight jeans and sports socks and things like that and they used to say to me you should not be dressed liked that at your age - why not I used to say...'

(Ilan 6/7/05)

Ilan's comment both acknowledges and denies his chronological age which has reference to an alternative positioning device identified by Jones (2006), namely the 'mask of ageing' which is explored in further detail below. The duality of the expression of chronological age contained in Ilan's comments also intrinsically celebrates ageing through the acknowledgement of lived experience. In this comment, Ilan is actively managing his presentation of self as an older person and is also rejecting other people's perceptions of him as an older man and their perceived ideas of what older people should be.

Gail's attitude to her own ageing is expressed differently:

'I have never had a problem with getting old... I remember when I was 30 and everybody kept saying to me god you are 30 this year and it didn't bother me but the morning of my 30th birthday when I woke up I felt old - which was quite surprising - and my cousin came into to see me that day - who I was very close to who was actually 12 years older

than me and she said I felt dreadful when I was 30 but once you got your head round it - she said its okay because she said you start feeling young again then ... I had no problems about being 40 - I had no problems about being 50 and I wasn't bothered about being 60...

(Gail 30/4/07)

Here Gail treats ageing as unproblematic which could be viewed positively. She does acknowledge that, for her, being thirty was somewhat problematic but that the other birthdays have not been as difficult. Earlier in the interview, Gail, in reflecting on the meaning of age, says that when she was a teenager she always wanted to be older than she actually was:

'I can remember when I was in my early teens – 14 or 15 – I desperately wanted to be 17 – I thought 17 was a wonderful age – in between bit – not quite grown up – because of course you were not grown up until you were 21 when I was young – but I thought 17 sounded really nice and I very much wanted to be 17 and I enjoyed being 17 – I didn't particularly wanted to be 18 but when I got there I didn't mind...'

(Gail 30/4/07)

Jones' (2006) work would suggest that Gail is here positioning herself through her use of language into a position which implies positive inferences about her own ageing and that growing older is not a problem for her.

8.3 Age-based dissociation - 'I am not old'

In the comments that are made by Janice, Ian and Gail above, there is a clear process being reflected in how they are talking which in turn is related to how they are making sense of what it means to them to be an older person. In their use of language they are actively managing their presentation of self as well as reflecting many of the tensions and complications that are associated with the image of being an older person.

The use of the third person pronoun 'they' rather than the first person plural pronoun 'we' is identified by Jones (2006) as another positioning device and this is reflected in Janice's references to the members of the 55+ group when she argues that 'they' and not 'we' are old, despite her valiant attempts to shake them out of their perceived malaise. However, as I have already indicated, the use of such pronouns may, in fact, reflect Janice's recognition that the differences between them are not only the presentation of age but also of gender and race.

Interestingly, the use of the third person pronoun 'they' features in Butler's (1975) definition of ageism above and, to employ Jones' analysis, Butler is positioning himself as not being an older person which is somewhat ironic given that he is defining a process that separates and stigmatises older people.

Another device that Jones (2006) identifies is the 'mask of ageing' (Featherstone and Hepworth 1989, 1991) in which the self remains consistent whilst the embodied self or the mask becomes the visual presentation of age. This internalised dissociation is reflected in my commentary about my own experience in Riga, Latvia outlined in Chapter 1 in which, despite the embodied manifestation of fifty two years of living, my felt self was very much rooted in a belief that I was

still in my twenties. During the interviews with the older lesbians and gay men which were related to growing older, I asked each of them how old they felt they were drawing a clear distinction with their chronological age. Their expressed felt ages varied with Ian feeling that he was thirty six, Robert, fifty, Steven, seventeen, Janice, forty two, Gail 62 (her actual age). Rachel was the only one who felt older than her chronological age which she attributed to her very poor health and the extent of her dependence on others which reflects the commonly perceived imagery of late life in that it is associated with illness and dependency. Whilst the use of this 'mask of ageing' separates the true self from the individuals age, Janice, in a more subtle manner, articulates the converse in that she maintains that it is her visual appearance that enables her to claim that she is twenty years younger which, for her, represents the convergence of the embodied and felt self.

The final two positioning devices that Jones (2006) identifies are 'being a special older person' and the rejection of normative assumptions about being old. Both have a measure of applicability within the narratives of the older lesbians and gay men. In terms of being special, Jones (2006) states that this was relatively common in her research and is used to refer to those people who represent themselves as in some way different to the ordinary older person. The resonance with my research is clear in terms of the older lesbians and gay men constructing their sense of being 'special' located within their sexuality. This is exemplified by Robert's claim that being gay makes being old easier:

'...whether it is just me but I don't know - but yes I do - well gay men - gay people - I think it makes it easier - I think because - admittedly I have not been in a relationship I have always been independent - I think being gay - being independent - being part of a minority - having

*to stand up for self it does make you more of an independent person
therefore find being older easier - I think.'*

(Robert 31/10/05)

At the same time as the older lesbians and gay men are asserting their 'special' quality, they are also asserting that they are old whilst rejecting normative assumptions of ageing. This is articulated in Janice's comment above in which she asserts that, despite her age, she feels 'fit' or as Ian states many men of his age have given up sex but he has not:

*'...cause I knew several people my age who had given up ten years
before I did on the same thing - no time for it - couldn't be bothered - I
have met people on the gay scene - my age - never had since they
were 55 - weren't interested after that - my next question was why -
oh couldn't be bothered couldn't be bothered looking for it...I can still
do it - I go to the sauna once a week at least - but it's just that you - it's
got to be when you are in the mood for it when you get older not when
your partner or latest bit of stuff is in the mood for it - you know its not
that you want to do it every minute of the day type thing - you pick your
times and places - you can be a bit more choosy about your companions...'*

(Ian 6/7/05)

Each of the positioning devices that have been highlighted by Jones (2006) are employed in the narratives of the older lesbians and gay men which, at one level, suggests that an age-based dissociation is being used to separate themselves from other older people. The basis of such dissociation is complex involving reflections on their own status as older people as much as a 'specialness' which is

derived from their sexuality. However, it is important to further reinforce the nuances that are associated with their statements which, in turn, reflect the tensions that are evidently being negotiated as they construct their own understanding of what it means to be an older person. Whilst they are employing these positioning devices they are also articulating much more complex ideas about ageing.

Whilst Jones (2006) has highlighted the positioning devices that are employed in older people's narratives about being older, there are other broader cohort issues that equally disaggregate and act to separate the experiences of older people. Minichiello et al. (2000) explored older people's understanding of the impact that ageism had on their lives through an examination of their stories. In general terms, they found that whilst the term 'ageism' had little meaning to the research participants, the effects of ageism were recognised in their narratives. The effects being described have their sources in differing groupings as both younger older people and those in very late life use age-based categories and stereotypes in their description of their perceptions of older people. In the use of age related categories and stereotypes by older people, Minichiello et al. (2000) refer to this as an expression of internalised ageism (see Rodeheaver 1990) in which older people themselves express discriminatory views about ageing and older people which are, in turn, either directed against themselves or their peers. Scrutton (1990) highlights an important distinction between ageism and other forms of oppression arguing that whilst ageism, racism and sexism have a lot in common, there are two differences between ageism and the other expressions of oppression, namely:

1. Older people do not form an exclusive group and everybody will become a member, however, the white racist will not become black and the male sexist will not become a woman BUT the young ageist may become old.
2. Ageism can appear to result from the natural process of biological ageing, rather than being socially constructed – therefore ageism can appear to be “natural” and thereby there is nothing wrong with ageism.

The implication of Scrutton's first point is that older people have considerable experience of ageist ideas and stereotypes as they are likely to have employed these ideas when they were younger. As a consequence, older people are imbued with ageist attitudes which act internally to diminish their own perceived value and worth, as well as that of other older people. Whilst older people may be imbued with ageist ideas that have developed over the life course and by the experience of living in an inherently ageist society, Itzin (1986) argues that a distinction is drawn based on chronological age and that this constructs a hierarchy of ageing. Thus being aged eighty is perceived to be better than being ninety but worse than seventy which, in turn, is worse than being forty. This idea of chronology being the basis of a negatively orientated hierarchy has implications for my research in that all the older lesbians and gay men that I interviewed were at the younger end of the spectrum that is older people, with the oldest person being Ian who was born in 1930. Itzin's chronologically based hierarchy, when associated with Scrutton's (1990), Rodeheaver's (1990) and Minichiello et al.'s (2000) comments about the potential of internalised ageism, does establish a process of disaggregation or separation based on the rather naïve and simplistic idea that 'old' means older than me. However, this idea of hierarchy is expressed by Janice:

'...well ok they - the '55+' group want to represent the proper older people - they want to represent old age pensioners still and this group this organisation has been set up to access money for the elderly for the old age pensioners - but gay old age pensioners and it was like it's a fabulous thing to happen but it is not for me and I cant see how I can help them...'

(Janice 31/7/07)

The second point raised by Scrutton (1990) is the more complex issue of distinguishing between the biological effects of ageing and the social constructions which are laid upon this. Thus, inevitably and unavoidably, each and every one of us age, the effect of which combines with environmental, social, life style and genetic factors to shape our physiological status which is reflected by Janice when she clearly states that, at sixty four, she feels fit. The context in which she is expressing this and also her need to assert her wellbeing is the social construction and her belief fed by a lifetime of ageism is that at sixty four she should not feel fit and should even be unwell. Whilst identifying Janice's comment as ageist, I am not suggesting that she is especially ageist, but rather, given the pervasiveness of ageism in an endemically ageist society, it is inevitable that she and other older people, reflect such ideas in their understanding of themselves as older people.

Physiological ageing has been an important factor in Ian's understanding of his ageing self and, in particular, the effect that growing older has had on his libido. As we have seen in Chapter 7, the effect on his ability to perform the sexual act placed tensions on his twenty year relationship with his partner that resulted in them accepting another man into the relationship which eventually resulted in the

relationship between Ian and his partner ending. So, for Ian, growing older is primarily related to decline and diminution of his physical ability. Robert and Steven reflect Ian's commentary on the effect that growing older has had on them, and equally locate this change within the decline of their physical ability to engage in sex with other men.

'well the obvious thing of growing older is the obvious thing of diminishing physical capability - I don't have the strength that I had when I was younger - I think as a gay man it probably produces a feeling of regret - if I was 20 years younger or 30 years younger - I would have a much better sex life than I have now - although my sex life is not momentous but that applies to everybody not just gay people - as you get older - you regret that there are things that you no longer can do - yes I think that is it really.'

(Robert 31/10/05)

Whilst all three of the men locate a negative attitude to growing older within their embodied selves and their perception that their sex lives have changed for the worse, they are also quick to assert that they still engage in sexual activity although the regret, to use Robert's term, is about performance. Clearly we are seeing here the articulation of the interaction between age and masculinity, as the latter requires that to remain 'real' men they need to continue to 'perform' or engage in sexual activity, despite the differences between gay and heterosexual men in the expression of that activity.

The distinction between the physiological and the socially constructed effects of ageing and being older is reflected in the work of Minichiello et al. (2000) who

identify the basis upon which older people themselves draw complex and contradictory distinctions in the meaning of 'old'. They argue that, in fact, older people do not employ chronology as a basis of distinguishing between themselves and other older people, but rather they employ a range of negative attributes which include:

'...not trying, withdrawn, isolated, irritating, self-oriented, living outside the mainstream, unattractive, uninteresting, frail, senile, silly over the hill, narrow-minded, a burden, lonely, vulnerable, dowdy and unproductive.'

(Minichiello et al. 2000:259)

These attributes are referred to as 'states of being' and Minichiello et al. claim that associating these with the self is the point at which the individual older person recognises that they are old. The issue in terms of disaggregation is not simply one of the self being free of these states of being but also includes attributing the converse to the self. Thus having a positive or a young attitude, not looking or 'acting' old, being fit and active and engaging in new activities and learning all mean that the individual is not 'old'. These positive ascriptions relate to the idea in Jones' (2006) work of the denial of age. Most obviously, these positive attributes have been expressed in Janice, Ian and Robert's narratives. For Minichiello et al. this issue of attributing and recognising these states of being with the self forms the basis of the distinction between 'being' old and 'feeling' old, as many of their research informants commented that they were not old because they did not feel old.

Minichiello et al.'s (2000) respondents employed other criteria to distinguish between being and feeling old, such as income and retirement, although it was health and wellbeing which were identified as having a strong correlation with being old. Of the people who participated in my research, Rachel was the only one who was experiencing chronic and severe ill health. In contrast the other participants were physically and mentally very well when the interviews took place. However, whilst the experience of chronic illness has characterised Rachel's experiences of being older, the origins of her ill health emerged some twenty years earlier when she was a younger adult. The association between ill health and later life is strong and is made manifest in the broader images of later life illustrated by the attributes of being 'old' identified by Minichiello et al. (2000). Other than Rachel, who was living the experience of chronic ill health, all the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research associated their individual futures with diminished health and increased dependence.

The studies by Jones (2006) and Minichiello et al. (2000) have illustrated how older people both view and separate themselves from the image of what being 'old' means. Whether it is in the use of positioning devices expressed through the use of language, or through the perception of self in association with the assumed attributes of being 'old', the meaning of being old to older people is complex. Whilst the dissociative techniques have been highlighted and illustrated, it is also clear that the older lesbians and gay men, in a seemingly contradictory manner, associate themselves with being older people. In Janice's comment about being sixty four, she is clearly associating herself with older people based on chronology - she is sixty four and that makes her old. However, within the same comment she then dissociates herself from older people by maintaining that she remains fit with the result that she is not like older people.

8.4 Positive expressions of ageing.

An additional dimension needs to be considered alongside the complications and subtleties that are associated with the negative expressions of ageing, which are, of course, the more positive ascriptions of growing older. For both Ian and Gail, the positive aspects of growing older are attributed to having much more life experience:

'...gaining more experience of life and how to adapt it to your present situation - when you haven't got the experience you do stupid things - um - the stupid things I'm not talking about the usual stupid things I mean you take risks in friendships and things like that - if you had a little bit more experience and if you valued the friendship you wouldn't put it on the line by doing something stupid...'

(Ian 6/7/05)

While Gail comments:

'...I think in my 30's my life was really good and I think that is probably true for everybody else as well - it think it takes you until being 30 - you have been grown up long enough to know yourself and have some sense of proportion and balance about things - to understand yourself and confidence in yourself'

(Gail 30/4/07)

Both Gail and Ian have located experience to give positive connotations of growing older. However, their references are reflections of their individual characteristics

and are about increased confidence based on experience. In broader cultural terms, this association between age and experience becomes an important social signifier which attributes 'elders' as being both wise and sage which, in the face of diminished physical attributes, means that older people can continue to play an active and valued role in society through guiding the younger others. Minichiello et al. refer to this characteristic of growing old as 'sageism' and define it as:

'...a positive form of ageism, the assumption that older people are wise or 'sages'.

(2000:268)

Whilst the term 'sageism' is not widely employed by social gerontologists, the association between age and wisdom has many cultural and literary references. Thane (2000) refers to Symon Goulart who, in his publication *'The Wise Veillard'* which was translated into English in 1621, associates particular characteristics with age categories, thus from the ages of fifty to sixty five : 'a man is yet lusty, strong and youthful' and from sixty five 'old men may be fit to be counsellors of estate and directors and governors of families' however, from eighty five they are 'fit for nothing' except for conversation and the enjoyment of their children and grandchildren (Thane 2000:57). Ingrisch (1995) employs a case study - Ms U - who in her adult life had varying roles, particularly in her family. However, when her husband died and her children left home, she felt that she was not needed until her grandchildren arrived when she became needed and was able to advise younger mothers adopting the role of a wise older woman. This is exactly the role that Janice has adopted and identifies for herself when she describes her relationship with younger black men through which she is able to advise them and they, in turn, respect her as a black lesbian.

However, in general terms, we do need to exercise considerable caution about the association between age and wisdom and, in particular, how this is being employed. This association is based on broad assumptions which in turn have a homogenising effect by assuming that **all** older people have wisdom. This, in turn, reflects underlying ageist assumptions that can romanticise the position of older people in society and assume that experience equates to learning and wisdom. An older person may have many life experiences but this does not necessarily mean that they have learnt anything from them, or that what they have learnt is either valued, or needed.

8.5 Transitions and continuity

In the process of self-making, points of transition become important life events that can act as the catalyst for change. The stories that the older lesbians and gay men have told about their lives do contain many references to how their lives have changed over their life courses and how these discontinuities or transitions have impacted on their sense of self. Brammer defines a transition as:

'... a short term life change characterised by a sharp discontinuity with the past. Thus transitions have identifiable beginnings and usually definite endings.'

(Brammer 1992:1)

Perhaps the most obvious point of change or transition in the life course of the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research was the point at which they disclosed their sexuality: they 'came out'. For all three of the women,

this was a life-changing event, not least because each of them had to disentangle their lives from the men that they had married. Gail and Janice experienced severe and violent reactions from their husbands and all of them, in turn, experienced significant disruption to their lives which included poverty and homelessness. However, these transitions continued as they engaged in the self-making process which would enable them to express their sexuality as lesbians. In this process, Rachel made a self who remained fond of her husband and who, in order to make a living, engaged in activities which addressed some men's sexual fantasies:

'...I then trained myself into being a dominatrix - which suited me fine because I wasn't having sex - I was getting paid and I was slapping shit out of them (laughing) it was pretty damn wonderful - everyone was happy...'

(Rachel 30/9/07)

Rachel explains how she understood these activities in terms of sexuality but also locating them within the context of her embodied gendered self. Rachel was not having sex but rather she was acting a role that gave pleasure to the man who was paying her. Her own source of sexual pleasure came from the activities that she undertook with the woman with whom she was in a relationship at that time. For the men, their stories of 'coming out' vary considerably, Ian's sexuality became a topic of family conversation initiated by his adopted sister, knowledge of Steven's sexuality became the focus for him of living up to what he felt were Christian values, while both Steven and Robert never 'came out' to their respective parents. In the making of the sexual self, all six of them negotiated a way in which they could achieve a sense of coherence in being a lesbian or a gay man and a gendered man or a woman whilst they maintained familial and social relationships.

The second major socially recognised transition is, of course, the transition into later life as each of them grew older. This transition is a point of significant change in the life of the self which can impact on status and income and can be accompanied with ill health or the prospect of declining health. In a similar manner to 'coming out', their experience of this transition has occurred at different times in their life courses and for different reasons, none of which conform to the received understanding of retirement which is forced on the individual at the ages of either sixty or sixty five. Following his early retirement, Steven became very depressed which occurred after many years of poor treatment by his employer following his decision to 'come out' at work. Ian planned his early retirement based on some sense of gender equality - if women could retire at sixty, then so would he. Robert retired early because of changing employment patterns at his place of employment. For both of them, the experience of leaving work was, in fact, very positive based primarily on the decision being their choice and not one that was forced upon them. Ian went to University to undertake a degree and Robert moved from London to the north of England in order to follow his canal boating interests. Janice also gave up full time employment to pursue her interests in film making, arguing that her pension has given her a sense of financial security:

'...since I have become 60 and I have got a pension so that I know I have always got something coming so I feel well more relaxed in a physical way and in a mental and a emotional way - I feel very peaceful very content with where I am and what I have got - I still want more though and I feel in a state of wholeness in respect of I would like to have a partner now...'

(Janice 31/7/07)

Severe and chronic ill health has been a feature of Rachel's life from about the age of fifty. When I asked her about what she felt the future held for her, her response was short, emphatic and entirely negative *'not a lot - at best - I am lost for words.'* (Rachel 7/10/07). The transition to later life for Rachel has been about the perpetuation of poor health and dependence which characterises both her own view and the general very negative images of later life.

The point of change in a person's life, of transition, can also be the point of continuity and, in this respect, we can see that whilst growing older and moving into later life has been such a point of individual transition for the older lesbians and gay men there are also aspects of continuity in their lives. Daatland and Biggs comment that, in the discipline that is social gerontology, the understanding of *'a good old age' rests on the platform of personal and social continuity.'* (2006:5). In fact, within the auspices of Continuity Theory (see Atchley 1989, 1993), they argue that transitions or discontinuities are perceived to undermine the individual older person's *'successful ageing'*. According to Jamieson and Victor continuity theory argues *'...that, although people seek change, they also seek a certain amount of continuity, both psychologically and socially'* (2002:13).

Each of the older lesbians and gay men have continued to express and engage in different aspects of their earlier adult life, the most obvious being the perpetuation of their sense of their sexual selves as lesbians and gay men. Equally, all of the women have continued to be mothers, albeit now to adult children. Robert, Steven, Gail, Janice and Rachel continued to be single, and whilst Ian moved into later life in a relationship, he has experienced the transition of separation and is now also

single. The final transition that has taken place is, of course, Steven's death which was unexpected.

8.6 Conclusions

This chapter has focused on the narratives of the older lesbians and gay men that are related to their experiences and understanding of being an older person. We have seen that, whilst the stereotypical image of later life is broadly negative, the older lesbians and gay men's understanding of themselves as older people is complex.

Employing the perspective of self-making highlighted by Heaphy (2009), the potential exists for older lesbians and gay men to construct new or alternative ways of being older people, as much as they have in their earlier lives constructed their own expressions of their lesbian and gay selves. This point is, in part, reflected by Estes et al. (2003) who maintain that discontinuities have a positive value in respect of ensuring a radicalisation of how we construct our understanding of later life. The evidence from my research would suggest that this is, in practice, not happening and that the older lesbians and gay men are not constructing ambitiously new and alternatives ways of being older people situated within their sexuality. However, they are continuing to engage in self-making as they individually negotiate the meaning of being lesbian or gay and being an older person. As much as they were sites of resistance to heteronormative expressions of sexuality, individually they are now sites through which challenges to the dominant expressions of being older people can be and are being made. As they continue to negotiate the complexities of the meaning of being older lesbians and

gay men they will represent alternative ways of constructing what it means to be an older person.

The final chapter in this work seeks to try to understand the stories of the older lesbians and gay men. As this chapter has demonstrated, these stories are very complex and are imbued with subtle nuances which at the same time represent conformity to the dominant structures and challenges to these structures.

Conformity and challenge are tensions that the older lesbians and gay men have been engaged with throughout their lives and continue to be engaged with as they negotiate their understanding of what it means to be an older person and engage in the processes of self-making. The chapter explores different theoretical positions which can or can not assist in our understanding of their meaning of self as older people. Dialogism is identified as a useful construct from which we can begin to explore the tensions and the negotiations that are involved in self-making.

Chapter 9 - Developing an understanding

9.1 Introduction

During the research process, the focus of the study has moved and been refined, not least as a consequence of trying to make sense of the stories being told to me. At this point in the thesis, the basis upon which this evolution has been made and its direction, I hope, is clear. This refinement has given rise to two important questions that have emerged from the research:

- What are the processes through which this group of older lesbians and gay men have developed a very clear sense of their sexuality whilst engaging in complex responses to ageing and growing older?
- Why have these individuals rejected the dominant discourses of heteronormativity and homophobia whilst embracing aspects of the discourse on ageism?

This chapter explores these questions by critically reviewing the current range of social gerontological theories and the dominant constructs of self whilst positing an alternative, that of dialogism. My search for a theoretical approach which would facilitate an understanding of the narratives and the stories that were being presented to me, was driven by three inter-related influences that are associated with preconceptions and assumptions. The first influence is an acknowledgement of my own assumptions about the nature and experience of the earlier lives of the older lesbians and gay men (see Chapter 1). Through listening and talking to each of them individually, I have learnt that I was being heavily influenced by the conditions of the present from which I was making assumptions about the nature

of the past. My desire therefore was to approach the conclusion of this research in a manner that was very different to how I started. My objective was to achieve an understanding of meaning which was, as much as it could be, free of ontological influences and unencumbered by preconceptions, thereby enabling the meaning that the older lesbians and gay men gave to their understanding of their lives and their selves to influence my understanding of meaning rather than the other way round, which was the position in which I started this research.

The second influence, which is related to the first, involves an acknowledgement that existing social gerontological theories and the classic and Enlightenment constructs of self are themselves the subject of significant influences, which, in turn, affect understanding. As I will outline in the following section, social gerontological theories are on the whole influenced by the assumption that ageing is a social problem that requires understanding in order to achieve a condition that is being described as 'successful ageing'. This premise, I feel, has the consequence that any understanding of later life achieved by employing such constructs will inevitably conclude that the self in later life is also a problem. Equally, in constructing an understanding of the meaning of the self, both de Peuter (1998) and Skeggs (2004) maintain that the dominant theoretical approaches privilege independence and autonomy which become the desired attributes for the self. The antithesis of these attributes - dependence and lack of autonomy - constructs not only negative images of the self but also the lack of potential for the negation of self. The constructed images of older people invariably associate later life with dependence and a lack of autonomy therefore to employ constructs which view such attributes so negatively will, I feel, inevitably result in an understanding of the ageing self which is negatively orientated.

The third influence reflects the manner in which the research has been undertaken and the conceptual premises that have informed this. As indicated in Chapter 2, the approach that I adopted was set within the paradigm of qualitative research with a particular emphasis on narratives and listening to the voices of people who share their stories about their lives. In this respect, the research has been situated within the context of dialogue in which the spoken word is located within a present which is informed by a past.

My desire therefore was to approach an understanding of the meaning of the selves that were being presented to me unencumbered by my own assumptions and the preconceptions of theoretical constructs. Dialogism, I believe, affords greater opportunities to achieve an understanding which is free of ontological influences and assumptions and is also able to reflect and articulate the 'multivoicedness' of the self.

9.2 Theories of ageing

The purpose of this section is to critically evaluate the underlying assumptions that are implicitly incorporated into the attempts to understand and explain the nature of ageing and the experience of older people. My starting point is a comment made by Hazan:

'The inaccessibility of the experience of being old, coupled with the inadequacy of available conceptual frameworks, calls for an entirely different kind of approach to the acquisition of knowledge about ageing...The importance of gerontology is not in its substantive contribution to the understanding of the nature of old age but in its allusion to the limits

of our knowledge of the essence of human existence. The main instructive value of seeking knowledge of ageing is the potential it offers for facilitating an untried and vanguard experiment in unlearning and debunking.'

(1994:94, cited in Andrews 1999:316)

This passage touches on a number of important issues related to both our understanding and conceptualisation of age, ageing and what it is to be an older person. He is drawing our attention to the *'inadequacy of conceptual frameworks'*, which, in turn, place limits on our current understanding of what it means to be an older person. Hazan makes us focus on the development of conceptual frameworks, which, I would argue, are premised on an understanding that ageing is a problematic state that requires examination in the manner that we may explore any other social problem. It is not surprising in an endemically ageist society that, in theorising later life, the starting point is that ageing is a problem and if this is the starting point, then inevitably these constructs will end trying to explain this problem and will, in themselves, 'problematise' ageing.

The process of attempting to understand old age through theoretical constructs resembles in many respects the journey from modernism to post-modernism, as such constructs moved from viewing older people as an homogenous group to an increasing recognition of the diversity that is represented in both the lives of individual older people and amongst older people in general. This process began in the early 1960's with two contrasting theories set within the functionalist paradigm which Biggs describes as *'...mark[ing] the beginnings of modern theorising in gerontology.'* (2006:100). The first of these is disengagement theory, which was based on limited empirical research undertaken in the late 1950s by

Cumming and Henry (1961) from the University of Chicago. The theory purports to describe the conditions of 'successful ageing', as the older person:

'...withdrew from the major roles of life whilst society concomitantly ceased to depend on the individual for the performance of these roles...Far from being pathological, social disengagement in later life...was universal, inevitable and healthy...Crucially...it did not lead to any loss of morale, well-being or satisfaction with life. There is a harmony between the individual and society.'

(Coleman 1993:84)

This theory, which espouses the idea of 'successful ageing' in terms of the disengagement of older people from society, has been the subject of substantial criticism, which focuses on encouraging and perpetuating negative attitudes towards older people (Estes et al. 1982); condoning a policy of indifference towards older people (Shanas et al. 1965) and a misinterpretation of the data (Rose 1965). The contrasting theory within this paradigm is Activity Theory, proposed by Havighurst (1963) who maintained that 'successful ageing' could be obtained by maintaining into later life the patterns and behaviours of middle life. Happiness or success in later life is related to the extent to which old age is denied as the individual maintains their activity levels. Bond et al. (1993) identified two major criticisms of activity theory, namely that it denies the impact of biological ageing and also denies the structural position of older people in terms of reduced income and poverty, which can ensure that continued activity is too expensive for many older people.

In both these functionalist theories, older people are viewed as an homogeneous group within which there is no differentiation. However, with the development of conflict theories or structuralism in the late 1970s and the 1980s, a differentiation did emerge as political economists highlighted the effect that capitalism had on older men and feminist commentators began to insist that older people could also be women. In the former, the central concern was the construction of structural dependence as older workers (men) were excluded from the workplace and forced into retirement living on reduced levels of income and enduring structural poverty (Townsend 1981; Walker 1982 and Walker and Phillipson 1986). Feminist commentators such as de Beauvoir (1970), Freidan (1993) and Arber and Ginn (1995) have provided an insight into the position of older women, primarily arguing that the devalued status or invisibility of older women is the continued expression of the patriarchal oppression experienced when women were younger.

Andrews (1999) maintains that there has been a move by researchers and commentators into understanding later life in terms of agelessness by maintaining that age is a social construction. Andrews, in the title of the article, refers to the '*seductiveness of agelessness*', arguing that, in denying the social construct that is age, we exclude an essential component of ourselves - the life that has been and, importantly, is still being lived. The elimination of the social category that is older people, Andrews argues, represents another expression of ageism, which, in turn, is reflected by the absence of any commentary that similarly seeks to remove the social constructs that are childhood, adolescence and adulthood from our consideration. This process of denying the significance of age, Andrews maintains, establishes a dualism:

'Rather than regarding the internal and external aspects of ourselves as

inextricably bound together, part of an integrated whole which comprises our being, we compartmentalise them imposing upon them a false dualism. We compartmentalise the ageing process as one in which there is an increasing conflict between two camps: on the one side, our corpus, which drags us inevitably into our dreaded old age, and on the other, our spirit which remains forever young...thus old age disappears.'

(Andrews 1999:301)

Such a duality, which I have conceptually referred to earlier as 'separation', acts in two ways as it seeks to describe the removal of the self from others and constructs an internal separation of our cognitive self from our corporeal self as we maintain that we are, despite our age, 'young at heart' and not like other older people (these issues are developed further below). This later imagery, of a separation between our cognitive and corporeal selves, resonates with the more classical construction of the Cartesian dualism and has been recently articulated in the idea of a 'mask of ageing', the basis of which rests on:

'a distance or tension...between the external appearance of the face and the body and their functional capacities, and the internal or subjective sense or experience of personal identity which is likely to become more prominent in our consciousness as we grow older.'

(Featherstone and Hepworth 1989:151, cited in Andrews 1999:305)

Within the mask is a 'young person' who is trapped and confined by the mask which is the older body. This Cartesian-type idea panders to and reflects the construction of ageism both in terms of the denial and rejection of the ageing self but also establishing the 'evilness' of ageing which seeks to trap and contain the

young in a decrepit and decaying prison. Such an idea conjures the images contained in folk and fairytales, such as the evil stepmother in '*Sleeping Beauty*' who plotted the ruination and containment of the young beautiful woman or evil witches with their hooked noses, rotten teeth and blood-curdling laughs. It is interesting how quickly the idea of the young trapped by the old becomes a gendered artifice with the negative association with and representation of older women.

Post-modern commentators on later life such as Biggs (1999, 2001) and Powell (2006), have placed an emphasis on identity and the ageing self as being the site of fluidity and multiple identities reflecting a fragmentation of meta-narratives and an emphasis on micro-narratives. This move from modernism to post-modernism involves the deconstruction of the 'embodied, agentic humanist human subject' (Goodley et al. 2004:100); arguing instead for a view of subjects as 'fragmented, decentred and multiple' (ibid) who interact with the structures or meta-narratives of society. In addition to Goodley's assertion of the agentic self interacting with structures or meta-narratives, we need to add an understanding that agentic selves also interact with other agentic selves. However, in order to begin to understand the lives of older people and the meaning that is given to these lives, our analysis needs to go beyond the interaction of an agentic self with other agentic selves.

Whilst recognising the fluidity of identity and placing emphasis on micro-narratives post-modern commentators on ageing have successfully focused attention on the lives of individual older people and how these lives have been experienced over the life course. In this respect post-modern commentators are acknowledging that

older people, as much as people from any other demographic group, have a past, a present and a future and that this temporal dynamic not only interacts with the agentic self but also represents an interface with other intersecting expressions of the self, which, in turn, are affected by the passage of time and the development of new meanings of these different expressions of the self.

As an illustration of this point, our understanding of sexuality in general and lesbian and gay sexuality in particular has changed significantly within the life course of the people who participated in my research. At the same time, the social structures that regulate sexuality have also changed, with the result that the socio-legal response to lesbian and gay sexuality is now very different to that of the past in which the older lesbians and gay men, whose stories are told in this work, grew up and began to develop a sense of who they were. To understand the meaning of these changes requires us to engage with individual older lesbians and gay men in order to establish the sense that they have made of these changes over time and the impact that these changes have had on their sense of self in their past and for their present.

Powell and Gilbert (2009) explore the idea of an ageing identity, which becomes an additional identity subsumed within the mix that is the ageing self. The presupposition behind such a claim to an ageing identity is that this becomes an additional component to the ageing self and, with this, comes the need to identify the time in the life course when the individual subsumes such an identity into the milieu which is the self. The most obvious point at which such an ageing identity may be claimed or no longer denied by the individual is when they cease working or withdraw from the organised labour market - the point at which they retire. It is

at this time that the ascribed identity or identities that were associated with their employment become an ex-identity or identities. Whilst this association between retirement and the absorption of an ageing identity may be somewhat naïve given the complex arrangement of employment patterns and retirement practices that are current within the organised labour market, such an association harks back to the political economists' analysis of later life enshrined in the structured dependency debate.

In seeking to understand or explain the nature of ageing and the circumstances in which older people are placed, the dominant theoretical constructs all share the same limiting assumptions, which are the negative qualities that are ascribed to growing older. The functionalist theories of Disengagement and Activity purport to point the way to 'normal' or 'successful ageing', whilst the political economists and feminists focus on the effect of structures which victimise older people ensuring that their lives are lived in the experience of oppression at the hands of either capitalism or (younger) men. In denying the existence of ageing, those researchers and commentators who seek agelessness are ignoring the biological and temporal inevitability that our corporeal selves age and this leads to the 'mask of ageing' theorists who argue that within each older person is a trapped younger person waiting to get out.

Hazan's (1994) comments that started this section, I feel, reflect a common problem that is fundamental to the difficulties associated with attempts to theorise 'ageing', which is the ascription of ageing to older people which, in turn, resorts to the homogenising of older people. Ageing becomes synonymous with older people when, in fact, ageing as a process is experienced by each of us throughout our life course and is a universal human experience. Ageing as a universal experience

becomes one facet of the self that interacts with other such facets and which also has a temporal component, as these interactions occur both in the here and now and also in the past. As such, I sit here as an older gay man having been a young gay man, a younger adult gay man, a middle-aged gay man and I hope, in time, a gay man who will become much older. In this respect, each of the selves which comprise the milieu which is my self will experience the same process of ageing. I am not seeking to deny ageing but rather to see that ageing is part of living and is part of the life course, which has different meanings at different times in the life of the self rather than being an identity, which intrinsically separates me from others be they my peers or people older or younger than me. Given these limitations, the dominant constructs of social gerontology, I feel, are not able to assist in responding to the emerging questions of this study.

9.3 Conceptualising the self.

As much as ageing has become synonymous with older people, so too has the idea of self become intrinsically linked with concepts of identity, personality and personhood. Such is the implicit power of an ascribed identity and personality that our very being is reduced and measured by others' recognition of the attributes that are associated with behaviour and which, in turn, inform identity and personality. In the early part of the twenty-first century, to be regarded as having no identity or personality is the ultimate sin and, with such a state, comes a perceived lack of worth, of personal irresponsibility and, ultimately, an absence of being. This conceptualisation of the self is intrinsically linked to the 'other' because it is in interaction with that 'other' that the self is known through recognition and construction. Therefore the processes of socialisation and social interaction are pivotal in the production of the self which is acknowledged by Blaikie :

'Identity refers to a sense of self that develops through socialisation and social interaction. Rather than being an ascribed, immutable property of the individual, it is a condition that can only be understood as provisional: instead of simply being ourselves, we are forever in the process of becoming what we are.'

(Blaikie 2006:80)

In referring to the processes of socialisation and social interaction as the instrumental forces of identity, Blaikie (2006) highlights processes which quickly become subsumed in our understanding of this concept as the focus moves from the social to the individual: the identity becomes the intellectual and emotional 'property' of the self. Thus it is the self that is seen to have an identity and in becoming the 'property' of the self; it is the self that has to take responsibility for ensuring that it is boundaried and that it has a clear articulation, which, in the social milieux of modern societies, must be recognised and accepted. In being recognised, accepted and boundaried, the self develops coherence and integrity. These are important tasks for the self as incoherence or lack of integrity reflects badly on the self. Not only is coherence of identity important within the self, but another layer or imperative is added in the expectation that the coherence needs a clear trajectory: it needs to grow and develop because without this an identity stagnates and doesn't adapt and change as the other developing selves adapt and change. 'Keeping it real' is the other imperative, as the identity needs to be either perceived as, or is afforded greater respect, if it is authentic and not contrived.

Blaikie brings these constituent expressions of self together when he comments:

'The inner-directed notion of self as moral character has arguably been replaced by the idea of personality...a 'performing self' who like a stage actor, learns a variety of scripts and acts out multiple roles depending on the requirements of the situation. This apparent social necessity has implications for identity, for whereas the modern self was obsessed with building an identity and keeping it stable, in a climate of social uncertainty, the postmodern self is preoccupied with avoiding commitment and needs constantly to be able to mutate and move on.'

(Blaikie 2006:84-85)

The presence of the social in the construction, definition and presentation of self is immutable as its presence acts to inform the self as much as the self informs and shapes the social. This discourse or interaction is critical in establishing an understanding of the self, but it is not without historical, contextual and temporal influence as meta-narratives shape the social and, in turn, are reflected in the construction of the self. However, the self is being constructed and presented as a single entity, the imperative of which is to maintain internal coherence and integrity. Blaikie, in the comment above, makes an important point related to the *'performing self'* that acts out many different roles and scripts. The self, rather than being a single entity *per se* is the summation of many different expressions of the self developed over the passage of time and which perform together as a single entity. The intersection of these different expressions of the self affords the construction of a unique self, which garners meaning from both these intersections and from the passage of time through lived lives. The potential then exists for self to become coherent with integrity based upon the meaning given to these different expressions of the self.

In her analysis of the development of self, de Peuter (1998) maintains that classical discourses have shaped our perceptions of what the self is and how it is both maintained and constructed. Her analysis begins in ancient times as she identifies those classical philosophers such as Pythagoras, Euripides, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle and Augustine each of whom was influential in constructing our understanding of the self by respectively focusing the study of philosophy on to the human subject; developing the idea of self knowledge; articulating the pre-eminence of the individual; the structures of the self and finally the relational position between the metaphysical and the self.

De Peuter (1998) moves on to explore the 'ontological permanence of the soul' as the soul becomes synonymous with the self and is mediated and articulated through a relationship with God and, more latterly through theological structures stressing the absolute importance of coherence, authenticity and unity of self. The Enlightenment, with its influences of rationality and the importance of science, saw the synonymous relationship with the soul replaced by the supremacy of the rational and secular mind. This, in turn, gave rise to the importance of self-definition and self-determination through agency, which are reflected by the ideals of the liberal individualism of Bentham, Mills and Rousseau in which Western ideas of the self are expressed through '*...continuity of personal identity the coherence, unity and integration of the self and the authentic, singular and progressive core self*' (de Peuter 1998:32).

Clearly, de Peuter's historical analysis has highlighted how the various formulations of the self contain coherent philosophical influences, which, in turn, afford primacy for the personal traits of individualism, independence and autonomy that are so desired in Western culture. These traits of the individual are assumed

to be the natural state of the human condition; whose consequence is that the perceived value of these artifices are not recognised as social constructs or the product of a particular set of social arrangements. The effect is to value and give worth to one set of individual traits over their polar opposites - dependency and a lack of autonomy, which are not only perceived negatively but are also reviled as individual traits of weakness and burden. The emphatic nature of these assertions denies the much more subtle lived experiences of the loss of independence where the crucial determinants become both time and positive potentiality. Thus dependency is much more acceptable if it is both short-lived and temporary containing the obvious potential of regaining independence.

However, when it comes to the perception of dependence in later life, the mitigating factors of positive potentiality and time limited duration are not part of the generally recognised imagery. Instead, such dependency is conceived and projected as a burden, which has negative connotations and is associated with images of extended and extensive dependence on others. It is this perception that then feeds into our collective understanding of ageing and later life, which is seen as being dominated by either the actual or threatened loss of independence and autonomy. Later life in general, and older people in particular, become the site of the antithesis of Western individualism, which sees the ideological basis of the negative perceptions of this phase of life articulated through the endemic and pervasive expression of ageism.

Skeggs offers us a similar deconstruction of the philosophical foundations of what she refers to as 'contemporary formulations of the self' and notes that when working with:

'...the different concepts of self...how similar they were to the old notion of possessive individualism that Macpherson (1962) identifies as the cornerstone of seventeenth century political theory.'

(Skeggs 2004:75)

The focus of Skeggs' work aims to demonstrate the class basis and bias that informs such constructions and to illustrate that they are better able to provide understandings of the middle class self than the self in a working class context. She begins her analysis by employing the work of Stallybass (1998) who argues that the European colonial powers drew a distinction between their own possession of, and relationship to, material goods and the relationships that people from West Africa maintained to such goods. This analysis clearly identifies colonial, imperial and racist influences, as the Europeans saw their possession as based on value in exchange, whilst the West African possession of goods was demonised and thought 'primitive' as they were perceived to contain 'history, memory and even personality' (Skeggs 2004:76). This difference in the nature of the relationship with material objects became the basis of the dominant European concepts of self set as they were within both colonial power and class positions. Skeggs' argument clearly demonstrates that European concepts of the self reflect ideas of what the self should and should not be, based upon pejorative and racist assumptions of the 'other'.

In a similar manner, she also claims that the more recent developments in understanding the self as reflected in particular models or approaches, are also strongly influenced by dominant philosophical expressions. These models are identified by Skeggs with their associated sources as:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1. The aesthetic self | proposed by Foucault (1977) - the self is formed through the power of discourse. |
| 2. Cultural omnivore | proposed by Erickson (1991 and 1996) and others - the self accruing cultural forms notably from the working class. |
| 3. The prosthetic self | proposed by Lury (1998) - the self is based upon experimentation - 'I can therefore I am'. |
| 4. The reflexive self | proposed by Giddens (1991) and Beck (1993) - the self is produced through biography and risk - 'I think therefore I am' |
| 5. Possessed individual | proposed by Kroker (1992) - a possessed individual as the state of modern freedom because it involves perfect forgetfulness. |
| 6. Habitus | proposed by Bourdieu (2000) - not directly a formulation of self but a technology of strategic game-playing accrual. |

(Skeggs 2004:77-84)

In their analyses, both de Peuter (1998) and Skeggs (2004) have demonstrated how the dominant constructs of self are heavily influenced by the social and political conditions in which they are formulated and how the construct of the self, far from being free from ontological influences, has become the pre-eminent artifice of Western culture as it privileges individualism, independence and authenticity. As Skeggs argues:

'...the different models of the self proposed in contemporary theory...work

in their different ways both as analyses and constitutive of different aspects of middle class experience and strategy...That is why self-making is class-making...'

(2004:89-90)

The purpose of this analysis is to acknowledge that conceiving the self is the subject of ontological influences which have effects on how the self is perceived and understood. Given such conceptual influences and outcome biases, I wanted to ensure that, in conceptualising the self within my research, this was undertaken employing a different set of ontological influences. The key issue for me was that the process of obtaining the stories for my research was undertaken through dialogue: individual interviews between the research participants and the self that is me. Within this process there were located many other stories, which are themselves accounts of dialogue either with individuals, groups or with social structures. It is this process of dialogue that enabled the stories to be told and that constructed the stories that were told.

9.4 The dialogic self

This section explores the conceptual framework that is dialogism and how perceiving the self as a construct of dialogue can achieve a better understanding of the issues raised by the questions that have emerged through undertaking this research. I will outline the basic premise of dialogism and apply it to both the research process that I undertook and the issues that arose from the subsequent analysis of the stories that were told by the three older lesbians and three older gay men.

Dialogism, as a conceptual construct of the self, is attributed to the Russian literary commentator Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975) and a group of his peers who are referred to as the Bakhtinian circle that includes such authors as V. N. Voloshinov and Pavel Medvedev. The concept of dialogism, which emerged from the writings of Bakhtin and the circle, is an attempt to move beyond the theoretical standpoints of the classical paradigms that have so heavily influenced Western concepts of the self as discussed above. As de Peuter argues:

'By challenging the ideals of Western personhood and making innovative use of the implications of such a challenge, a dialogical perspective can, quite literally, speak through and dialogue with theories of narrative identity, to bring the latter into the domain of critical social analysis. Dialogism and narrativity share a common foundation of relationalism, choosing a subject-centred, anti-individualistic, relationship orientated perspective...The dialogical alternative, however, departs from the monologics of mainstream narrative-identity theory, where integration, cohesion and coherence of self are privileged, to honour the equal viability of the forces of synthesis and dispersion, unity and fragmentation, or centripetal and centrifugal forces which produce the dynamic tension of selfhood.'

(De Peuter 1998:31)

In constructing an alternative approach to the classical paradigmatic constructs of the self, dialogism presents them as 'monological thinking', which is developed upon 'bivalent foundations'. Dialogism places its emphasis with the dialogue that exists between social actors and it is through this dialogue that the self knows both its social environment and itself. As such, the idea of 'authorship' becomes

important (Horrocks et al. 2004) as the stories of the self are located within a dialogical relationship between the self and the other. Thus Tappan claims that:

'The stories that self-as-author produces thus do not arise ex nihilo from a single, solitary mind, spoken by a single monotonic voice. Instead such stories emerge from a dialogical relation that must be the primary unit of analysis.'

(Tappan 1999:118)

Dialogism moves towards its emphasis on the self in relation to the other by acknowledging dualities or binary oppositions which present themselves as push-pull factors in which, as de Peuter (1998) reiterates, selfhood emerges through '...the dialogues of synthesis *and* dispersion, unity *and* multiplicity, or the centripetal *and* the centrifugal (de Peuter 1998:32-33, emphasis in the original). Communication as the dialogic is in continual tension between the forces that push towards unity, agreement and monologue representing centripetal forces and the centrifugal forces of multiplicity, disagreement and heteroglossia (Shotter and Billig 1998). This tension has important implications because, as Bakhtin observed:

'Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear...It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life as language...the authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia; anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accentuated as an individual

utterance.'

(Bakhtin 1981:272)

In the *'Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics'* (1984), Bakhtin highlights the multivoiced nature of Dostoyevsky's work by arguing that there was not one single author or voice - Dostoyevsky's - but rather there are many voices, which include the literary characters as well as the author and that this, in turn, gives rise to a polyphony. Polyphony draws upon a musical metaphor in which the multivoicedness of the communicative act resembles, or is synonymous with the different instruments performing their part within a musical whole. Brown (2005) claims that the key to 'understanding... polyphonic voicedness is the appreciation of equality' (Brown 2005:90). As Vice suggests:

'[Bakhtin] argues that here the character and narrator exist on the same plane, the latter does not take precedence over the former but has equal right to speak. The polyphonic novel is a democratic one, in which equality of utterance is central.'

(Vice 1997:112, cited in Brown 2005:90)

De Peuter (1998) argues that the dialogic self is no longer a self-contained entity with an interiority and with clear boundaries, the product of the mind which excludes other selves, but rather the self and selfhood is a joint product, 'a dialogue on the boundaries of selfhood and otherness' (de Peuter 1998: 39). As a consequence the 'I-for-myself' is a process in flux and development and which simultaneously is also the 'I-for-others'. So the self is always being formulated in a dialogic relation to the other be that through internal or external dialogues. This dialogical tension also, according to Hermans et al. (1992), enables the 'I' to

fluctuate and be shaped by (for the purpose of this research) the monologic dialogues of heteronormativity, homophobia and ageism. As Hermans et al. explain:

'The I fluctuates among different and even opposed I positions. The I has the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. The voices function like interacting characters in a story, involved in the process of question and answer, agreement and disagreement...The dialogical self is conceived as social - not in the sense that a self-contained individual enters into social interaction with other outside people, but in the sense that other people occupy positions in the multivoiced self.'

(1992:28-29)

The term 'heteroglossia' is employed by Bakhtin to both identify how *'each voice in turn can...draw upon the array of complex discursive resources'* (Brown 2005:92) to produce and manage meaning in every utterance, which, according to Holquist, means that dialogism:

'...assumes that at any given time, in any given place there is a set of powerful but highly unstable conditions at work that will give a word uttered then and there a meaning that is different from what it would be at other times and in other places.'

(1990:69)

Whilst the 'author' or the self is, with every utterance, engaged in dialogue with *the* past, *the* present and *the* future, they are also engaged with *their own* past and

their own present and *their own* future as well as the past, present and future of the other. In this regard, the self retains creativity, responsibility and agency as the author of their dialogic self within the context of the other. It is this 'intertextuality' together with dialogism - the co-creation of selves - that Harrienger (1998) argues develops meaning based upon experience, context and dialogue.

The dialogic understanding of self, based on Bakhtin's ideas of the tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces, which are themselves dialogic and that the self is given meaning in dialogue with others, establishes a critical separation and distance from other classical and Enlightenment formulations of self that place an emphasis on coherence, unity and authenticity. In such formulations, as identified above, coherence, unity and authenticity rest within the individual's rational consciousness as the property and responsibility of the self-contained and self-possessed individual. In contrast, their opposite states - a lack of coherence and authenticity and disunity - are taken to represent the disintegration of the self. The self, as a result of the tensions described above, is always in a state of flux and is a never finished subject being, as it is continually influenced by the dialogic of the other. These key attributes of self - coherence, unity and authenticity - have little credence within dialogism because of their dual emphasis on internality and stability.

Whilst the dialogic may be presented as taking place in the here and now, dialogue always has a context (intercontextuality) which has a temporal component. The word has meaning in a dialogic relationship with the other within which the dialogic engages *the* past and *the* present as much as it does *my* past and *my* present and *their* past and *their* present. Sandywell suggests:

"Time" can now be viewed as a dialogically mediated construction that is inseparable from society's general communicative and interactional strategies.'

(1998:205)

Whilst the dialogue may be taking place within a given time frame, as soon as the word is uttered by the author its meaning is imbued with the meanings that are given from events and discourses in the past, as well as events and discourse from the present. This understanding of time within a dialogic context has particular resonance for my research as the storytelling has focused on events in the person's past. The analysis that dialogism advocates affords the opportunity to view both the stories that were told to me by the older lesbians and gay men and the processes by which they were obtained as interactions that are imbued with a complexity that reflects the self in interaction with another self. Thus the interviews have a dynamic which inherently contains a temporal component that relates to the spoken word which is uttered in a particular place and in the context of an interaction which has a specific focus or task. The words spoken in these interactions have meanings which convey understanding based upon the past, the present and the future of the selves that are taking part in these interactions. The words are also the summation of the interface between the different expressions of the self as developed over time and in different circumstances. These interactions, in turn, reflect the inherent and dynamic tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces as expressed by the words uttered in the interviews. Thus these tensions that are described through a dialogic understanding are made manifest in lives that are lived. The stories that are told by an older black lesbian are also the stories of a mother, of a person who grew up without a mother, of a manual worker, an artist, a philosopher and what these mean in the present, have meant

in the past and may mean in the future. In a similar manner, the stories of an older gay man whose employment in his chosen loved profession are the stories of a career and a sense of self that was cut short because of his sexuality and are also the stories of a son, a lay preacher, a friend and a lover. These expressions of the self interact in a dialogical sense to construct the self with a past, a present and a future, which in turn is expressed in the dialogical process of telling the story of a life.

These stories have addressed events that have been subjected to the powerful monologics of heteronormativity and homophobia which have, over the life course of the storyteller, changed considerably in nature and significance. In this respect, the telling of stories in the present about the past can be seen to be subjected to a dialogic which is, in turn, informed by time.

9.5 The monologic that is ageism

References have been made in this chapter to monologism and, whilst this section will focus on ageism as a monologic, the lives of the older lesbians and gay men whose narratives are the basis of this work have also been affected by such processes that go beyond the discrete oppressions of homophobia and heteronormativity. As such race, gender, class and other social divisions have intersected in each of their life courses and find expression through the stories that they have told about their lives.

Monologism is described by Gardiner as:

'...a condition wherein the matrix of ideological values, signifying practices, and creative impulses which constitute the living reality of language are subordinated to the hegemony of a single, unified consciousness or perspective. Whatever cannot be subsumed under this transcendent consciousness is regarded as extraneous or superfluous. In other words, monologism denies the "equal rights of consciousness vis-à-vis truth (understood abstractly and systematically)".'

(1992:26)

In defining ageism, Butler (1975) (see Chapter 8) employs descriptive language in order to illustrate the effects of ageism on the self and which, in turn, reflects the power of monologism in that ageism acts as a *'single, unified consciousness or perspective'*. Implicitly, ageism also asserts that the negative imagery of decline, decay and death are the 'natural' and inevitable consequences of ageing and as such this assertion becomes immutable.

The effectiveness or operation of the monologic within a dialogic context is described by Bell (1998) as being enacted through three 'conversational positions', which he describes as objectivism, subjectivism and subjectivo-objectivism. These are explained as:

'...objectivism - when someone says that my statement is the final and unalterable truth, proved through science, God, philosophy, economics or some other external firmament: the last word on the subject. I do not need to take into account what you say. By subjectivism I mean when someone says that I have my perspective - my standpoint, my bias, my experience - which is just as good an authentic as any other, so I don't have to listen to

or take into account yours....By subjectivo-objectivism I mean a monological position which draws on both subjectivism and objectivism.'
(Bell 1998:55)

Berg (1996), in her application of dialogism to an analysis of the representation of older people in literature, notes that, in general, older people and commentaries about the position of older people in society are absent from literature, which she refers to as a 'silence' drawing a parallel with the absence of references to the position of women in society. However, importantly, she argues that:

'Creative understanding of the ageing process requires many voices from many disciplines, an understanding which will become truly creative, dialogic and dynamic only if the voices heard go against each other, mingle, fuse, take over after each other and subsume what has gone before.'

(Berg 1996:24)

This establishes the potential of a tautological paradox, given that Gardiner's understanding of a monologic is an immutable paradigm which, in its function, silences dialogic alternatives. Therefore Berg's assertion that the monologic will be subject to the forces of change as creative understanding garners the dynamic, creative forces of a multi-voiced dialogic would suggest that the monologic is not so immutable. The assumption of immutability denies the potential of change, which is exactly what has happened to the monologics of heteronormativity and homophobia. Change can also occur to ageism in a similar manner to the change that has occurred to both homophobia and heteronormativity. However, this fundamentally requires the acknowledgement of age as an intrinsic condition of the self irrespective of the position in the life course.

The stories that have been told through the narratives of the older lesbians and gay men, have, as discussed above, been significantly influenced by the monologics that are heteronormativity and homophobia. Throughout this process, the monologic that is ageism has been exerting its power and control, although this has functioned in a different manner to that of heteronormativity and homophobia. Whilst heteronormativity and homophobia have functioned in an almost consistent and universal manner throughout their life courses as something that is done to them, their relationship with ageism has a very different basis. Scrutton's (1990) comment about the young ageist who becomes old establishes a relationship with ageism in which the younger self becomes part of, and incorporated into, the monologic, which, in turn, acts negatively on that same self when they are an older person. In this respect, the association between the self and ageism changes substantially over the life course from the position of participation in... to victim of... In contrast, the selves that are the older lesbians and gay men have, throughout their life courses, been consistent sites of resistance to heteronormativity and homophobia and this affords a very subtle but significant difference between the effects of these monologics.

9.6 Towards a dialogic understanding

The three older lesbians and three older gay men who participated in my research shared with me some of the stories of their lives and their anticipated stories of the rest of their lives. In doing so, they and I entered into a dialogic process of storytelling as they recounted events that they felt were significant in the development of their self. For a brief period, I became part of their stories as much as they became part of my story.

In this process, they authored their stories that were, in a dialogic sense, given meaning through their utterances and their words and by the receipt of these by the other, which was me. In this context, the selves (each of them and me), were given meaning. Much of the focus of the storytelling was about their sexual self and how they understood the development of this self. Of particular importance for this group of people was that their emerging and developing sexual selves occurred at a time of severe reaction to that form of self. At that time, as I have stated before, their very being could have resulted in them experiencing, amongst other consequences, imprisonment, rejection from their respective family and loss of their children. They faced the very real prospect of being sacked from their employment, and of being ostracised from the communities in which they lived. Through these processes they emerged as confident lesbians and gay men who are clear about who they are and about who they are not. This 'difference' is an important constituent element of their current understanding of their selves.

Their stories told in the present have clear references to the past and the conditions under which they developed their own conceptions of self. In this context their stories contain the references to the dominant discourses or monologics of heteronormativity and homophobia, which jointly defined them as sick and evil. Despite these dominant processes, they emerged to develop their sense of self, which included an active rejection of who they 'should' be. In developing their selves - in becoming lesbian or gay - they were actively rejecting the dominant heterosexuality and with this the very powerful monologics that are associated with heterosexuality. This is all the more remarkable when we think that in the 1940s, the 1950s and the 60s there were no alternative ways of living presented to them and the prescription for them was 'treatment' to make them

heterosexual, to make them normal, to make them well. As they were growing up and later in early adulthood when they were much clearer about their sexuality, all the messages that they were receiving through the processes of socialisation were privileging heterosexuality and yet they maintained their difference. What then were the processes that ensured that they maintained who they were and rejected who they were not?

In each of their stories, they are very clear that same sex sexual activity gave and still gives them pleasure. Whilst the received messages from the monologic that is heteronormativity would have been clear about the 'proper' location of such pleasure being set within a heterosexual relationship culminating in children and the establishment of a family, their individual experiences offered an alternative. This alternative expression of pleasure is experienced differently based on gender as the men, on the whole, tell stories about opportunistic sexual encounters, whilst, in contrast, the women had embraced the heterosexual life formation but found that it did not bring them the pleasure that was promised. Each of the women describe their first kiss with another woman as the point at which the reality of pleasure was envisaged, became real and was made manifest. What this means is that their own, individual and authentic experiences offered very real alternatives to the monologic discourses.

The issue of authenticity, as I have indicated above, causes dialogism difficulties because its referent is located within the integrated, coherent and unified concepts of the self that emerge out of the Enlightenment and which are based in the rational mind. However, my research does suggest that the authenticity of pleasure received through same sex sexual activity facilitated both an affirmation of their sexual self and a rejection of the alternative. This suggests that, whilst

meaning is made dialogically in tension between centripetal forces that lend towards unity, agreement and monologue and centrifugal forces of multiplicity, disagreement and heteroglossia, authenticity acts to confirm which meanings are to be incorporated into the self or alternatively which meanings are believed.

As the three older lesbians and three older gay men aged, the dominant discourses or the monologics of heteronormativity and homophobia began to change and over time have changed considerably. There were the inevitable retrenchments of change (Section 2a of the Local Government Act 1988¹⁴), which cast doubts in respect of whether the lesbian or gay self would ever be fully accepted and recognised. The pace of change, however, quickened, such that the world in which lesbian and gay selves live now has been totally transformed and is almost unrecognisable from twenty years ago. The key issue here is that decades have passed from the point at which their sexual selves were being developed. Throughout this period one dominant discourse has persisted with very little change in its expression: the monologic of ageism. It is at this point that we need to recognise as Berg comments that 'a monologue can be dialogic in nature and a dialogue can be monologic' (1996:23). Berg draws our attention to the dynamics and the foundational basis of the comment made by Scrutton (1990), which has been referred to earlier: that older people do not form an exclusive group and everybody will become a member and that the young ageist will become old. On this basis, each of us has a relationship with this monologic, which changes as we ourselves age.

¹⁴ Section 2a of the Local Government Act 1988 required local authorities in England and Wales not to devote resources which promote homosexuality and prevented 'the teaching in any maintained school of homosexuality as a pretend family relationship' (Brown 1998:26).

With both Berg's and Scrutton's comments, we can envisage that the three older lesbians and the three older gay men, as Scrutton suggests that everybody does, engaged in the pervasive and endemic discourse or monologic that is ageism and learnt to be ageist, understanding what it means to be old from the perspective of the young. As they have in turn aged, so they will have experienced both the effect of their own ageing and the attitude of others towards them. In dialogical terms, we see exactly the same process in terms of meaning making, although in this instance the meaning has the potential, if not the probability, to be perceived very differently and negatively.

In terms of authenticity, the effect of ageing on the body inevitably means that as individuals they will have experienced the limitations that ageing brings with it, however limited the extent of these effects may be, which, in turn, ensures that the messages of decline and decay contained within ageism are seen to offer a particular sort of truth. Equally, this truth is imbued, not with 'pleasure' but with misery as the aches and pains and the limitations on performance foretell a dismal future. The authentic experience that was 'pleasure', which presented a truth that was different to the dominant discourses of heteronormativity and homophobia when they were younger, has very little resonance in later life, in which authenticity confirms rather than denies the imagery of the effects of growing older. Thus the authentic experience of ageing reinforces sameness rather than presenting an alternative. Thus the negative experiences associated with age are the same whether the person is gay, lesbian or a heterosexual. The claim to difference at this part of the life course rests with the context in which decline, decay and death take place and not on the basis of an 'I', which is differently old than 'you'.

Authenticity, based as it is on the real and lived experience of the self, is also significant in respect of other expressions of social division, not least race and gender. The intersection of all of these divisions as experienced by the self through the life course in turn gives rise to a self, which is the unique summation of the intersection of all of these divisions as authentically experienced by the self.

9.7 Conclusions - self-making and the dialogic self

In returning to the questions that are posed at the start of this chapter which emerged through the process of undertaking this research, achieving potential answers is very difficult, not least because of the complexities involved in understanding the self and its multiple expressions and manifestations. In terms of sexuality, each of the older lesbians and gay men who participated in my research have very clearly articulated their own sense of their sexual self; they are either lesbian or gay. This sense of their sexual self has been a consistent feature of their life course and remains so in their later lives. Each of the older lesbians and gay men individually engaged in the process of self-making in ways that constructed a meaning of themselves as lesbian or gay which were similar to those identified in Blasius (1994), Giddens (1991, 1992) and Weeks (1991, 1995, 2005). Additionally, this process of self-making involved incorporating a sense of themselves arising out of their class position, their gender as women or men, as well as their understanding of their racial and ethnic background as black or white and as mothers, childless adults or as single people. These additional expressions of the self are seen to interact and intersect with each other to inform an understanding of the self as both unique and complex. This unique and complex self has also engaged over the life course, in agentic decision making and actions based upon their understanding of self and their relationship with other agentic

selves. In this process of self-making they have both engaged with and rejected a number of dominant social constructs to become selves which by their very 'being' became the manifestation of the 'unnatural' and subject to social vilification and legal sanction.

This self-making process, the making of self as an alternative to the dominant norm, establishes the conditions in which they have been regarded for much of their adult life as 'other'. In dialogic terms, the self-making process with which they engaged represents as Shotter and Billig (1998) identified the tension between the forces that push towards unity, agreement and monologue, representing centripetal forces and the centrifugal forces of multiplicity, disagreement and heteroglossia. In each of their unique configurations of the self, as a lesbian mother, as a black lesbian, as a professionally employed gay man and as a single man who had not married, they managed the dialogical tensions between centripetal and centrifugal forces. The management of this tension is not, however, a single event which once resolved by the self goes away. Rather this is a continual and on-going process in the dialogic construction of the self. Time and social change adds further layers of complexity in the management of these dialogical tensions which is illustrated by the considerable change in the social and legal response to lesbians and gay men which have occurred within the course of their lives.

The sexual self that is lesbian or gay is therefore in constant tension with these forces and it is the self in tension that engages with, and is influenced by, the monologics that are heteronormativity and homophobia as well as by other monologics such as racism, class and sexism. The manifestation for the self of these monologics is made in dialogue as the self is exposed to, and engages with,

Bell's (1998) three 'conversational positions' and Berg's (1996) 'silence'. Thus the lesbian and gay self exists in an atmosphere or an environment of a multiplicity of representations of the self as 'other', which can be made real through the silence of no recognition of the sexual self, or the dialogic manifestations of the utterances and words of others, which, in turn, may reject, accept or tolerate the sexual self as 'other'. In either respect, the monologics of heteronormativity and homophobia have a presence in the everyday existence of the self. In the very being of the sexual self as the 'other', the older lesbians and gay men through their articulation of separation - by identifying themselves as not heterosexual - became sites of self-making and resistance to these monologics as they engaged in the construction of alternative selves.

In this chapter, I have argued that the individual experience of the alternative self - the 'other' - specifically as lesbian and gay is situated within the pleasure that same sex sexual activity has afforded each of the participants in my research. This issue of pleasure becomes the site of authenticity as same sex sexual activity is understood as pleasurable rather than the reflection of unnaturalness and evil. This experience challenges the authenticity of the dominant image of same sex sexual activity and confirms to the lesbian and gay self that such pleasure is not wrong, unnatural or evil. This issue of the authentic experience validating the self as 'other' does construct a problem for a dialogic analysis, which challenges such an idea as a reflection of Western ideas of the independent and autonomous self. Authenticity does construct a process through which the self in tension with centripetal and centrifugal forces can confirm or deny the dialogue based as it is on experience and thereby elect the expression of one dialogical self over another.

The older lesbians' and gay men's relationship or engagement with the monologic of gender, which, in turn, constructs both femininity and masculinity is somewhat different to their relationship with heteronormativity and homophobia. In the construction and manifestation of their gendered selves, they both incorporate dominant images and ideas of gender and represent a discontinuity of gender influenced by their sexual selves. In incorporating dominant images of gender we see the overarching power of hegemonic masculinity, which, in broad and general terms, privileges the male and subordinates the female. The older lesbians were acutely aware of their position as women vis-à-vis men and expressed solidarity with other women irrespective of sexuality. As women, they had all experienced and rejected the dominant expression of sexuality choosing instead same sex desire based on, and reinforced by, the authentic experience of their first kiss with a woman. In addition to the older lesbians' sense of their political and social position as women, they were also all mothers, who in later life continued to maintain relationships with their now adult children and in some instances, with their grandchildren. The status of being lesbian mothers earlier in their adult lives was, as we have seen in Chapter 7, the subject of considerable vilification. Despite the vilification, these familial relationships have been and continue to be very important to them and inform their sense of self as they grow older.

In contrast, the men are men and, as such, they experience the privileging of their embodied gender, which, as Ahmed observes, means that they can comfortably inhabit the normative:

'Normativity is comfortable for those who can inhabit it...'

(2004:147)

However, comfortably inhabiting the normative does not acknowledge the hierarchical diversity of masculinities which is dominated by the heterosexual man and finds its expression through hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. Whilst the men are men, they are, because of their sexual selves, perceived on the whole by heterosexual men as deficient, deviant, and not real men. In contrast to the older lesbians, the older gay men did not marry and do not have children. The absence of familial relationships in their lives is in part substituted by friendship networks and 'families of choice'. Friendships feature strongly in each of their narratives and they project the importance of these relationships into their later lives.

In both their expressions of their gendered selves - as lesbians and gay men - they experience, and are exposed to, the monologic that is homophobia. During the life course of the older lesbians and gay men, the monologics that are heteronormativity and homophobia have changed extensively and, in doing so, have altered the nature of the sexual self that has been the 'other'. Whilst the state in the United Kingdom still privileges heterosexuality, its reaction to the 'other', to lesbians and gay men, has changed to both validate lesbians and gay men through rights and a move to eradicate homophobia.

Throughout their life courses, the older lesbians and gay men have also been exposed to, and participated in, the monologic of ageism which is the other major focus of this work. However, this dominant discourse establishes very different relationships with the self than those of heteronormativity and homophobia. Whilst the latter discourses have established a fairly consistent relationship with the self (acknowledging recent changes in their expression) the nature of the relationship of the self with ageism does change through the life course. This change in the nature of the relationship reflects Scrutton's (1990) statement that the young

person who is ageist will, in time, become old. It is not the monologic that changes its expression but rather it is the individual's relationship with it that changes over the person's life course with the result that the individual moves from a position of participating in ageism to becoming a victim of it.

In Chapter 8 we have seen Itzin's (1986) assertion of the existence of a hierarchy of older people based upon chronology. All the participants in my research were, at the time the interviews were taking place, situated at the younger end of the age-based demographic category that are regarded as older people. Itzin's assertion of a chronological hierarchy is one component of the reflections on diversity amongst older people. Minichiello et al. (2000) identify health and ill health as a significant difference between older people, with ill health being regarded as the 'natural' and inevitable consequence of being an older person. Rachel's experience of severe and enduring ill health, and her resulting high levels of dependence, have been a feature of her life for some twenty years, over which time she has become an older person. In contrast, Steven's experience was one of a short period of acute and severe ill health, which resulted in his death. In anticipating or visioning their individual futures, the issue of their health status was significant and, in particular, their anticipation of dependence and need for care. In the classical and Enlightenment constructs of the self, dependence is the antithesis of the desired independent and autonomous self. In their narratives about their futures, each participant viewed dependence on other people negatively. They were especially negative about the current institutional provision in place to support and care for older people. In this respect, they assert another subtle nuance, which does not reject such institutional arrangements *per se* but rather asserts that they would have nothing in common in terms of life experiences with older people, with the effect that such arrangements would potentially leave

them either isolated or denying their sexuality. When offered the potential of lesbian and/or gay residential care, this was greeted as being a much more acceptable arrangement. Thus the structural arrangements for care in later life are not rejected outright but rather they are rejected because of the perceived atmosphere in which care is delivered.

Jones (2006) identifies how older people employ positioning devices such as the use of language and the denial of age as techniques that for dissociating themselves from other older people. We have seen in Chapters 5 and 8 how the older lesbians and gay men have both associated and dissociated themselves with other older people, acknowledging that they are old, that they are not old, and that they are differently old. In claiming that they are not old, the older lesbians and gay men employ this distinction in the same manner as heterosexual older people using euphemisms such as 'young at heart' in denying their age. They are also asserting a belief that they are not old like 'them', drawing upon the additional descriptor of their selves as lesbian or gay.

In articulating themselves as older people and as lesbians and gay men who have grown older, the adjective 'older' is also be employed to describe themselves in terms of the other intersecting expressions of the self. Thus Janice has become an older black woman with all the cultural ascriptions and images associated with that status. In terms of relationships, all the older lesbians have become grandmothers, a status which equally attracts a particular set of socially constructed images. As older lesbians and gay men their very 'being' continues to challenge received hegemonic images as they maintain their engagement in both the processes of self making and challenging normative assumptions. Thus, not only is Janice an older black woman, she is also an older lesbian, a mother and a grandmother. The

self that is Janice is inevitably the summation of these different expressions of the self and the experiences that this self has been exposed to throughout her life. This sense of a self, with its many different expressions, which has been influenced by lived experience and agentic choices, is found in all of the people who took part in my research. In this respect, whilst my research has focused upon age and sexuality, the selves that are the older lesbians and gay men are complex and unique individuals who have lived their lives through a period of considerable social change.

As much as the monologics that are heteronormativity and homophobia have changed over the preceding decade, the potential exists for a similar change to take place in the manner in which all older people are viewed and treated and equally how they view and treat themselves. Legislation which is currently before Parliament will for the first time make it illegal in the United Kingdom to discriminate in goods and services on the basis of age. This will be a profound move, which will have a significant impact on the lives of older people. However, the current government, in recognising the profound nature of this provision, is also establishing processes which will delay its full implementation. My hope is that as age discrimination becomes illegal, a profound change in attitude towards all older people will occur which will acknowledge the diversity and richness of the self that is the old person rather than relying on the pervasive and reductionist images of later life that dominant how as a society we regard old age. Age-based discrimination is so profound and pervasive that a radical change in attitude and perception is needed before we are in a position to move from a condition in which:

'When we look at the image of our own future provided by the old we do not

believe it: an absurd inner voice whispers that that will never happen to us - when that happens it will no longer be ourselves that it happens to...'

To a position in which:

'We...stop cheating: the whole meaning of our life is in question in the future that is waiting for us, If we do not know what we are going to be, we cannot know what we are: let us recognise ourselves in this old man or in that old woman. It must be done if we are to take upon ourselves the entirety of our human state.'

(de Beauvoir 1970:11-12, cited in Andrews 1999:303)

9.8 Reflections

At the very start of this thesis, I acknowledged that this research project has been life changing for me and has impacted on every part of my life. I have, in undertaking this work, extended and deepened my knowledge base which, in turn, influences how I see and understand the world in which the self that is me is situated. I have become much more reflexive in how I approach my life and can see my own engagement in the processes of self-making and how I negotiate the tensions involved in creating myself.

This has also been a very long process, primarily because I chose to undertake part-time study and it has not been without its own tensions. My life has changed significantly over the period of undertaking this work as my father died, my partner and I separated and, I experienced a life-threatening illness. However, studying in this manner has afforded me the time and the space to think and reflect on what I

was doing, why I was doing it and with what outcomes. I am very grateful to my supervisors who have stuck with me and, as we have acknowledged, we have, through the duration of this research project, grown older together.

There are things in this study that I would have done differently or, at least, would like to have done at the same time. For example, the approach that I took in analysing the transcripts of the interviews took me a year to work through based upon my attempts to understand the exchange between Ian and one of the founders of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, which is mentioned in Chapter 3. I could have adopted and applied more conventional methods of analysis such as discourse analysis, but then my understanding of the exchange that involved Ian brought me to a greater appreciation of the influences of the presentation of self, the management of self, self-making and the negations involved in living and being the 'other' within hostile social environments. However, there are also aspects of the study that I would not change, such as my engagement with the older lesbians and gay men, which, as I have stated above, I was very concerned in undertaking the interviews that this interaction was based upon clear ethical guidelines, did not harm them, and respected them and the stories that they were telling me. This I feel I achieved.

This thesis does have to end. However, in another sense it does not end as it has prompted my desire to explore other issues within a research context, although I have to acknowledge, given my own age and approaching retirement, that such projects should not take as long. I have outlined below some of the areas that I would like to explore in subsequent studies, namely:

1. Janice has undertaken a process of exploring her 'treasures' and how these interact with each other to produce a self that she is comfortable with. I would like to explore with other black lesbians and gay men how they identify and negotiate the interaction between these different aspects of self.
2. I would also like to explore the life courses of lesbians and gay men who are much older than the people who were involved in this study. Lesbians and gay men who are in very late life were obviously born earlier than the group who participated in this study, and necessarily lived a greater part of their lives as the 'other'. Equally, such a group becomes, as a consequence of ageism, more readily associated with the stereotypical images of older people.
3. Dialogism as a construct acknowledges the tensions involved in the making of the self and affords social gerontologists a mechanism through which we can achieve a better understanding of the tensions involved in being older people. I would therefore like to find a mechanism through which dialogism is seen as a relevant and appropriate construct to help us understand the meaning of being an older person.
4. I have already begun a project that explores the nature of the services that are available to support older lesbians and gay men whether this is in their own homes or in institutional settings. Rachel's experience and feelings about the care that she is so dependent upon; I feel is, extremely worrying, particularly as the agencies involved espouse equal

treatment. Anecdotally, I have also been told about a number of older lesbians and gay men who are in institutional care settings and who are very frightened about carers' reactions to their sexuality. This, I feel, needs urgent examination and exploration as I can not imagine what it must be like to be so dependent on the care of others and be so frightened of them.

Appendices A and B
and
Bibliography

Appendix A: Ethically sound research practice

This Appendix contains:

- A. An outline of the process through which the interviews were established and conducted,
- B. A copy of the form submitted for approval by University of Salford, Research Ethics Committee,
- C. Copies of the flyers that were distributed in order to recruit participants,
- D. A copy of the letter sent to people who made initial contact with me,
- E. A copy of the Return and Consent slips.

The processes through which informed consent will be gained involves the following processes:

1. participants will have to initiate contact with me in order to participate in the research,
2. following such initial contact I will undertake a telephone interview in order to establish that the person meets the research criteria,
3. the telephone interview will also be employed to assess capacity to give consent and if at any stage of the research, capacity becomes an issue the research process will cease with that person,
4. I will then send a letter to the person identifying the purpose of the research, the process and the time commitment involved with the research process,
5. The letter will ask the potential participant to contact me again if they wish to be involved with the research,
6. At the first meeting I will ask them to sign a consent form,
7. At the start of each subsequent interview I will outline the theme of the interview and ensure that the person consents to the interview,
8. Through out this process I will reinforce the participant's ability to withdraw from the research at any point and their right to refuse to discuss issues.
9. Participants will receive transcripts from each interview and will be asked to sign to confirm that this represents a true record of the interview.

UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD

Research Governance and Ethics Committee

Ethical Approval Form for Staff

Ethical approval must be obtained by all staff prior to starting research with human subjects, animals or human tissue. The member of staff must show and if necessary discuss the content of this form with the Research Institute Director before it is 'signed off'.

If the application for ethical approval is part of a bid for external funding, the form must be completed as a supplement to the Budget Approval Form.

The signed Ethical Approval Form must be forwarded to the Contracts Office and an electronic copy emailed to the Research Governance and Ethics Committee via Max Pilotti (m.u.pilotti@salford.ac.uk).

Please refer to the 'Notes for Guidance' if there is doubt whether ethical approval is required.

(The form can be completed electronically; the sections can be expanded to the size required)

Name of member of staff : Stephen Pugh

School : Community Health Sciences and Social Care

Research Institute :

1. Title of proposed research project

Understanding the development of sexual and ageing identity – older lesbians and gay men: an interpretive analysis

2. Project focus

This proposal is a part of doctoral studies registered at the Open University.

The focus of the project is to understand the social meaning attached to the development of the sexual identity of older lesbians and gay men and how such an identity has been affected by an ageing identity.

The research is specifically aimed at people aged over 60 years old (amended by variance July 2006). The research group would have been born at the latest by 1945. At this time and for decades to come, lesbian and gay sexuality was the subject of either severe social or criminal sanction. The research aims to understand how in such conditions older lesbians and gay men established their sexual identity. This group of people are now in late life and are the subject of a socially constructed ageing identity. The research further aims to understand what effect such an identity has had on their sexual identity.

3. Project objectives (maximum of three)

1. To understand the formulation of lesbian and gay identity at a time of severe social reaction to such an identity,
2. To understand the social meaning given to the social action in the development of sexual identity at this time,
3. To understand the effect of a socially constructed ageing identity upon an

individually developed sexual identity.

4. Research strategy (for example, where will you recruit participants? What information/data collection strategies will you use? What approach do you intend to take to the analysis of information / data generated?)

The epistemological basis of the research is set within an interpretivist paradigm employing phenomenology and hermeneutics. The methodological approach of the research is biographical oral history.

Profile of the research participants.

The research participants should have the following characteristics:

- People over the age of 60 years,
- People who define themselves as lesbian or gay,
- People who are cognitively able to give consent to participation in the research,
- People who are willing and able to talk at length about their early life in terms of their sexual identity and their current life as an older lesbian or gay man.
- People who live in the north of England.

Recruitment of research participants.

Given that there are very few structural arrangements that bring older lesbians and gay men together through which access can be obtained a range of other

strategies will need to be applied in order to recruit respondents which in order of priority include:

1. Networking,
2. Snowballing,
3. Writing to national and local lesbian and gay organisations that may have an older membership,
4. Developing a Web Site which would be part of the University of Salford's site,
5. Accessing other web sites such as Age Concern's lesbian and gay site,
6. Advertising in the national gay press – Gay Times and Attitude.

The approach to recruitment will be incremental to reflect costs, which have to be borne by myself. Equally, advertising in the national lesbian and gay press, whilst very expensive, has the result that the appeal for respondents is distributed throughout the United Kingdom and not solely in the target geographic area. As a consequence, networking and snowballing will be the initial approaches to recruitment that will be adopted.

Snowballing involves making contact with members of a particular group and asking whether they know of anybody else who in turn would be approached by the respondent and not myself. As a result, identifying the sample will rely on a process of self-nomination involving individual older lesbians and gay men contacting me in order to indicate their willingness to participate in the research. In facilitating self-nomination a number of contact points will be established which will include a web site, e-mails, a postal address and telephone contact details. At this point a telephone interview can take place to ensure that the individual does meet

the criteria for the respondent group and to identify any specific circumstances that may inhibit the research or that may need to be taken into account in the data collection process.

Information/data collection strategies

The information/data collection strategy, that is to be employed within the research, is semi-structured interviews on a one-to-one basis reflecting a guided biographical oral history approach.

The practical arrangements of time and place will be established in writing prior to the interviews with each older lesbians or gay men on an individual basis. The interviews may/probably will take place in the person's own home although clearly there are safety issues involved in conducting one-to-one interviews in such a location. I will establish a reporting mechanism, which identifies where I am, with whom and the time that I will leave the premises. The interviews will be one-to-one and semi-structured in nature to reflect the guided biographical oral history approach that is being adopted by the research. Such an approach enables a degree of focus within the interview in respect of the purpose of the research. The absence of a fixed structure, however, has the result that there is flexibility in the process of the interview in terms of the order in which issues are discussed within the guided focus. This would also facilitate the exploration of emotions and meanings particularly related to how the individual older lesbian and gay man felt about the experience of both forming their sexual identity and growing old. The responses should be more open-ended and enable the respondent to elaborate on issues. This is the key to the research in the attempt to understand the meaning given by the individual to specific events and the impact that this has had on their

identity.

The interviews will be audio-recorded backed up by field notes. The purpose of which is to establish a record of the interview, be as unobtrusive as possible and therefore reduce the influence of recording on the respondent. The addition of field notes provides some back up to the interview in case anything should happen to the tape and enable me to record some of my thought processes whilst conducting the interview.

Denscombe (1998) identifies key 6 skills which he feels are important for the interviewer, these are:

- Be attentive,
- Be sensitive to the feelings of the interviewee,
- Be able to tolerate silences,
- Be adept at using prompts,
- Be adept at using probes,
- Be adept at using checks in understanding the information.

As a qualified social worker whose practice experience was exclusively working with older people, I have had many years' experience of interviews employing the skills associated with such a process. Davies (1985) identifies ten principles involved in social work interviews, these being:

- Letting the interviewee know how much time there is,
- Starting where the client is in their understanding of the situation,
- Trying to be sympathetic so as to help make the atmosphere relaxed,

- Trying to see things through the other person's eyes,
- Knowing the danger of passing judgement rather than acceptance,
- Developing social skills such as smiling to help open out communication,
- Avoiding questions that can be answered with a yes or no,
- Not putting answers in the client's mouth,
- Not probing too deeply too quickly,
- Learning to cope with silences.

In addition to and interwoven with the principles of interviewing outlined by Davies (1985) is the value base of social work which is reflected in the concept of anti-oppressive practice. In addition, the professional requirement of reflection involves social work practitioners exploring how their own value base has impacted on to the situation in which service users are placed with a consequent effect on outcomes. Reflection requires the skills of open and honest self-examination and an understanding of the value base of the profession.

The interaction of the principles identified by Davies (1985) and the value base of the social work profession fits very well with the epistemological basis of this research and the requirements for interviewing respondents. Thus a focus on reflection within practice refers to Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' and the hermeneutic circle through which understanding is achieved by reflecting on the impact that the researcher's culture has on the knowledge that is being generated. Equally, Davies (1985) fourth principle of seeing through the other person's eyes is a fundamental aspect of hermeneutics in the search for the understanding of meaning. The emphasis on anti-oppressive practice ensures that the respondents as representatives of an oppressed group are acknowledged as such and

responded to with dignity and respect, and valued as having something to say. I feel that many years of social work practice and teaching of social work has equipped me with the necessary skills and value base from which to undertake the research in the manner that it is being established.

The interviews will be scheduled in a manner that reflects grounded theory's constant comparison method. Thus the first interview of the first respondent will inform the first interview of the second respondent and so on. The interviews will also be thematically guided to reflect the subject of my research. Given that I am proposing a maximum of ten interviews per person, the first five interviews will be organised thematically in the following manner:

Interview 1 Base biographical information and genealogy,

Interview 2 Early life,

Interview 3 Development of sexuality,

Interview 4 Adulthood,

Interview 5 Later life.

The following interviews, a maximum of five will enable themes that are developing from the analysis to be explored with the individual thus further reflecting the grounded theory approach of theory developing out of the data.

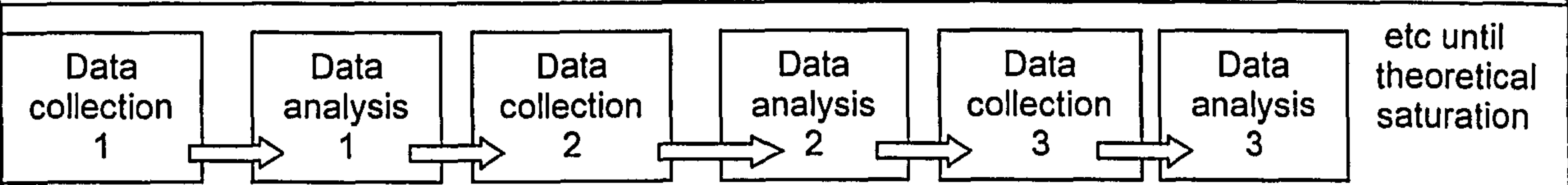
Analysis of the data

The search for understanding or *verstehen* is achieved in the analysis of the data that has been gathered employing the biographical oral history approach and in particular the guided biographical interviews. Given the nature of the data –

narrative text – and that the research is set within the interpretivist paradigm, quantitative approaches to data analysis are not appropriate. I will employ an eclectic approach to data analysis focusing on the biographical interpretive method and drawing upon aspects of grounded theory. Such an approach will ensure that the voices of the individuals being studied are heard which is an important aspect of the rationale behind the research.

The data obtained from the interviews will audio recorded and will be transcribed. The transcription will take place after each interview. In maintaining the grounded theory approach, the process of data analysis will take place after each interview with the result that the following interview of that theme will be informed by the developing theory which arises from the previous analysis.

This process is illustrated by Punch (1998) and is illustrated below:



Source: Punch (1998) page 167.

The text will be analysed employing grounded theory principles of analysis using the different procedures of open coding, axial coding and selective coding. These procedures of coding, as Flick (1998) describes are not clearly distinguishable or temporally separated, they are instead different ways of analysing text in which the researcher moves between in order to develop theory from the data.

This research will generate a large volume of data given that the proposal involves Up to five interviews per person with ten people being interviewed - a total of thirty

interviews and potentially 45 hours of narrative assuming each interview will take an hour and a half. The use of electronic data analysis packages such as NUD*IST, NVivo and ETHNOGRAPH will be explored in terms of suitability with my supervisors.

5. What is the rationale which led to this project (for example, previous work – give references where appropriate)

The rationale which has led to this research has a number of influences which includes a professional commitment to older people in general based within social work and gerontology and a personal interest derived from being a gay man in mid-life.

6. If you are going to work within a particular organisation do they have their own procedures for gaining ethical approval – for example, within a hospital or health centre? **NO**

If YES – what are these and how will you ensure you meet their requirements?

7. Are you going to approach individuals to be involved in your research?

NO

If YES – please think about key issues – for example, how you will recruit people? How you will deal with issues of confidentiality / anonymity? Then make notes that cover the key issues linked to your study

8. More specifically, how will you ensure you gain informed consent from anyone involved in the study?

The processes through which informed consent will gained involves the following processes:

1. Participants will have to initiate contact with me in order to participate in the research,
2. Following such initial contact I will undertake a telephone interview in order to establish that the person meets the research criteria,
3. The telephone interview will also be employed to assess capacity to give consent and if at any stage of the research, capacity becomes an issue the research process will cease with that person,
4. I will then send a letter to the person identifying the purpose of the research, the process and the time commitment involved with the research process,
5. The letter will ask the potential participant to contact me again if they wish to be involved with the research,
6. At the first meeting I will ask them to sign a consent form,
7. At the start of each subsequent interview I will outline the theme of the interview and ensure that the person consents to the interview,
8. Through out this process I will reinforce the participant's ability to withdraw from the research at any point and their right to refuse to discuss issues,

9. Participants will receive transcripts from each interview and will be asked to sign to confirm that this represents a true record of the interview.

9. Are there any data protection issues that you need to address?

YES / NO

If YES what are these and how will you address them?

There are a number of data protection issues that will need to be addressed during this research, namely:

1. Whilst the participants will be identified by code through the research process, specific personal details – name, address etc will be kept in a sealed box locked in a safe within the School,
2. The tapes of the interviews will also be kept within this box,
3. Access to the box will be restricted to myself,
4. Any information about third parties will also be coded in order to ensure anonymity and specific details will also be contained within the box.
5. At the end of the research process – after submission of the thesis, I will offer to return the material to the specific person or destroy it, witnessed by a senior colleague.

10. Are there any other ethical issues that need to be considered?

These have been addressed through out this submission.

Ethical issues in my research will be guided by four main influences, namely:

1. Code of practice issued by the General Social Care Council,
2. Code of practice for research issued by the British Sociological Association,
3. Regular supervision by PhD supervisors – Professor John Clarke and Dr. Jean Carabine,
4. The framework of ethical research in biography and ageing identified by Kenyon, G.M. (1996) Ethical issues in ageing and biography. *Ageing and Society*, 16:659-675

11. How many subjects will be recruited/involved in the study/research? What is the rationale behind this number?

Six older lesbians and gay men will be recruited to participate in the research with an equal balance between the genders. Each participant will be interviewed up to five times in guided semi-structured interviews.

Rationale behind this number reflects both the volume of the data collected (potentially up to 30 interviews) but equally an attempt to ensure a degree of representation of the broader population.

Please attach:

- A summary in clear / plain English (or whatever media/language is appropriate) of the material you will use with participants explaining the study / consent issues etc.
- A draft consent form – again in whatever media is suitable for your research purposes / population.
- A copy of any posters to be used to recruit participants

Remember that informed consent from research participants is crucial, therefore your information sheet must use language that is readily understood by the general public.

Projects that involve NHS patients, patients' records or NHS staff, will require ethical approval by the appropriate NHS Research Ethics Committee. The University Research Governance and Ethics Committee will require written confirmation that such approval has been granted. Where a project forms part of a larger, already approved, project, the approving REC should be informed about, and approve, the use of an additional co-researcher.

I certify that the above information is, to the best of my knowledge, accurate and correct. I understand the need to ensure I undertake my research in a manner that reflects good principles of ethical research practice.

Signed by Member of Staff	
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Date	
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In signing this form I confirm that I have read the contents and I am satisfied that the project can proceed subject to approval by the University of Salford RGEC.

Signed by RI Director	
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Date	
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*Please also complete and sign the attached Risk Assessment Form.

Understanding the development of sexual and ageing identities - older lesbians and gay men

I am a gay man working at the University of Salford as a lecturer and I am currently undertaking my Ph.D. with the Open University.

My research aims:

- to try to understand how at some point in their adult life older lesbians and gay men developed a sense of what it was to be lesbian or gay,
- to understand how older lesbians and gay men lived their lives and how they coped with their sexuality,
- to understand what effect growing older has had on their identity.

I am seeking older lesbians and older gay men (aged 60 years plus) who would be willing to talk to me a couple of times about their life

I would seek to minimise any inconvenience to each participant and would therefore be as flexible as possible. The conversations will be kept confidential and you will not be identified from the research.

Are you interested?

Do you know anybody who might be interested?

If so please contact Steve Pugh at the University or ring me on

**0161 295 2375 or e-mail me on
s.e.pugh@salford.ac.uk**

***Are you over 60 years old and lesbian
or gay?
Would you like the opportunity to talk
about your life?***

I am a gay man working at the University of Salford as a lecturer and I am currently undertaking my Ph.D. with the Open University.

My research aims:

- to try to understand how at some point in their adult life older lesbians and gay men developed a sense of what it was to be lesbian or gay,
- to understand how older lesbians and gay men lived their lives and how they coped with their sexuality,
- to understand what effect growing older has had on their identity.

I am seeking older lesbians and older gay men (aged 60 years plus) who would be willing to be interviewed by me a couple of times.

I would seek to minimise inconvenience to each participant and would therefore be as flexible as possible. The interviews will be kept confidential as will any material generated. Participants will not be identified from the research.

**Are you interested?
Do you know anybody who might be
interested?**

**If so please contact Steve Pugh at the University or ring
me on**

0161 295 2375

or e-mail me on

s.e.pugh@salford.ac.uk

Letter to be sent to participants following telephone conversation.

Dear

I refer to our recent telephone conversation and would like to thank you for making contact with me.

As I promised I am writing to you in order to give you details of both my research and myself so that you can decide whether you wish to be interviewed by me.

I am a gay man who has worked with older people as a social worker for many years and I have a very strong interest in issues that affect older lesbians and gay men. I currently work at the University of Salford teaching students about older people in general but also older lesbians and gay men.

My research aims to try to understand how older lesbians and gay men developed a sense of what it was to be either gay or lesbian earlier in their adult life, to explore how you coped with this and how you lived your life. I also wish to understand what effect growing older has had on you as a lesbian or gay man. I am seeking in total to interview six older lesbians and gay men – 3 women and 3 men and each person MAY be interviewed up to five times.

During the interviews, I will ask you to talk about a number of aspects of your life such as:

- Your childhood and family,

- Your early adult life,
- When and how you knew you were gay or lesbian,
- How you lived your life and how you coped,
- Your work, friends and family,
- What it means to you to be an older person and how this has affected you as a lesbian or gay man,
- How you see your future.

Each interview will take about 1 to 1 1/2 hours and will be tape-recorded. They will be arranged at a time that is suitable for you and in a place that you are happy with. The tape recordings will be typed up and you will get a copy of the typed version of your interview to make sure that you are happy with what you have said to me. You will be able to keep the copy of the typed version of your interviews.

The interviews that we talked about on the telephone will be part of a research project that I am doing for my PhD at the Open University. When the research is finished I will produce a report which will be submitted to and examined at the Open University. This report will NOT have your name or address in it or any details that can identify you. Only a very small number of people will read this report - my two supervisors at the Open University – Professor John Clarke and Dr. Jean Carabine and the people who will examine it.

I would also like to publish parts of my research but again this will be done in such a way that you are not identified.

If you are interested in being part of my research, I would be grateful if you would complete and sign the slips below and return it to me in the stamped addressed

envelope that is provided. I will then contact you to make an arrangement to meet with you for the first interview. If you do not want to be part of my research, you do not have to do anything else and I will not contact you again.

Whatever choice you make, I would like to thank you for contacting me.

Yours sincerely,

Steve Pugh

Return slip

I have read the letter attached to this slip and I am willing to be part of the research and be interviewed by Steve Pugh.

Signed..... Name.....(Block capitals please)

Address.....
.....
.....

Telephone number.....

Please return to:

Steve Pugh, School of Community, Health Sciences and Social Care,
University of Salford, Frederick Road, Salford, Manchester. M6 6PU.

CONSENT FORM

I (name)..... am fully in agreement with my participation in the research being undertaken by Steve Pugh.

I understand that:

- I will be interviewed UP TO five times
- The interviews will be tape recorded,
- I will get a typed copy of each interview to agree its contents,
- I can withdraw from the research at any point,
- I can refuse to talk about any aspect of my life,
- No personal details that identify me will be published in any format.

I agree that:

- The material can be used for the submission of PhD,
- The material can be published,

Signed..... Name.....(Block capitals please)

Address.....

Appendix B - The different stages of analysis of the interviews

01 SP What I wanted to do today Robert was to ask you
02 about your childhood in a bit more detail –
03 more about how you became aware that you
04 were gay that you were attracted to men – that
05 sort of era if you want – so if I could start then
06 – how would you describe your childhood
07 R um – it was quite happy – um I mean - I was
08 an only child so possibly a little lonely – um but
09 I didn't appreciate that at first – we um – we
10 tended to move around a bit – um and the first
11 home that I remember was in a place called
12 [name] which is in north London – and we
13 had a flat in a large Victorian house – and um –
14 the house had been owned by an Italian family
15 and they sold it – they sold it to a Jewish family
16 – I was too young to appreciate any of this –
17 my parents got on very well with the Italians
18 but they did get on very well with the Jewish
19 people – they eventually left and moved to
20 another flat in a house a short distance away –
21 still in [name] – and we got on well with
22 the people there – it was quite a happy childhood
23 – this is all pre school – um and my father was
24 working – I think I have mentioned this – my
25 father was working as a verger /caretaker at a
26 church which is in [name] – not far from

Structure and agency	Presentation of self
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation of image of only child – lonely• Family in rented accommodation (not unusual for that period) but owners identity ascribed, nationality/religious status – implicit Italians were better than Jews – structural construction of group identity with agency not liking the Jewish owners and then moving I• Happy childhood – positive image of childhood• Father working for and engaged fully with structure – religion	<p>Image of lonely only child – 1st and 3rd order of presentation</p> <p>Likeable family that got on well with people – Italian owners and new people once moved from new Jewish owners of the property – as a likeable family the Jewish owners are set up as the people who were not liked – stereotypical images of Jewish people as wealthy but not likeable 1st and 3rd order of presentation</p> <p>Happy childhood – presentation of past in positive manner – Rebecca myth 1st 2nd and 3rd order presentation</p> <p>Father has status within religious community 1st 2nd and 3rd order presentation</p>

Second and third stages of analysis transcription of taped interview of Robert 13th July 2005

Early childhood through to early adulthood – 5 years to 25 years

Structure and agency	Emerging themes (stage 3)
<p>Presentation of image of only child – lonely</p> <p>07 I was</p> <p>08 an only child so possibly a little lonely – um but</p> <p>09 I didn't appreciate that at first –</p>	<p>Only Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Presentation of image of only child – lonely – lines 7-9➤ Happy childhood – positive image of childhood – line 22
<p>Family in rented accommodation (not unusual for that period) but owners identity ascribed nationality/religious status – implicit Italians were better than Jews – structural construction of group identity with agency not liking the Jewish owners and then moving – the issue is getting on well</p> <p>14 the house had been owned by an Italian family</p> <p>15 and they sold it – they sold it to a Jewish family</p> <p>16 – I was too young to appreciate any of this –</p> <p>17 my parents got on very well with the Italians</p> <p>18 but they did get on very well with the Jewish</p> <p>19 people – they eventually left and moved to</p> <p>20 another flat in a house a short distance away –</p> <p>21 still in [name] – and we got on well with</p> <p>22 the people there</p>	<p>The effect of having an older father</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Differential socialisation into the adult male world – consequence of not having a younger father - lines 57-65➤ The affect of having an older father on agency – lines 72-77
<p>Happy childhood – positive image of childhood</p> <p>22 it was quite a happy childhood</p>	<p>The status and position of father's employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Father working for and engaged fully with structure – religion – lines 24-25➤ Part of structure but not complete orthodoxy – church on the margins of religious structure – but then increased status within structure as job is within the central church – lines 27-31➤ Restatement of structural status of father – accommodation linked to structural status – lines 32-36➤ Structure affords status – large, nice flat with garden – lines 46-48

Fourth stage of analysis transcription of taped interview of Robert 13th July

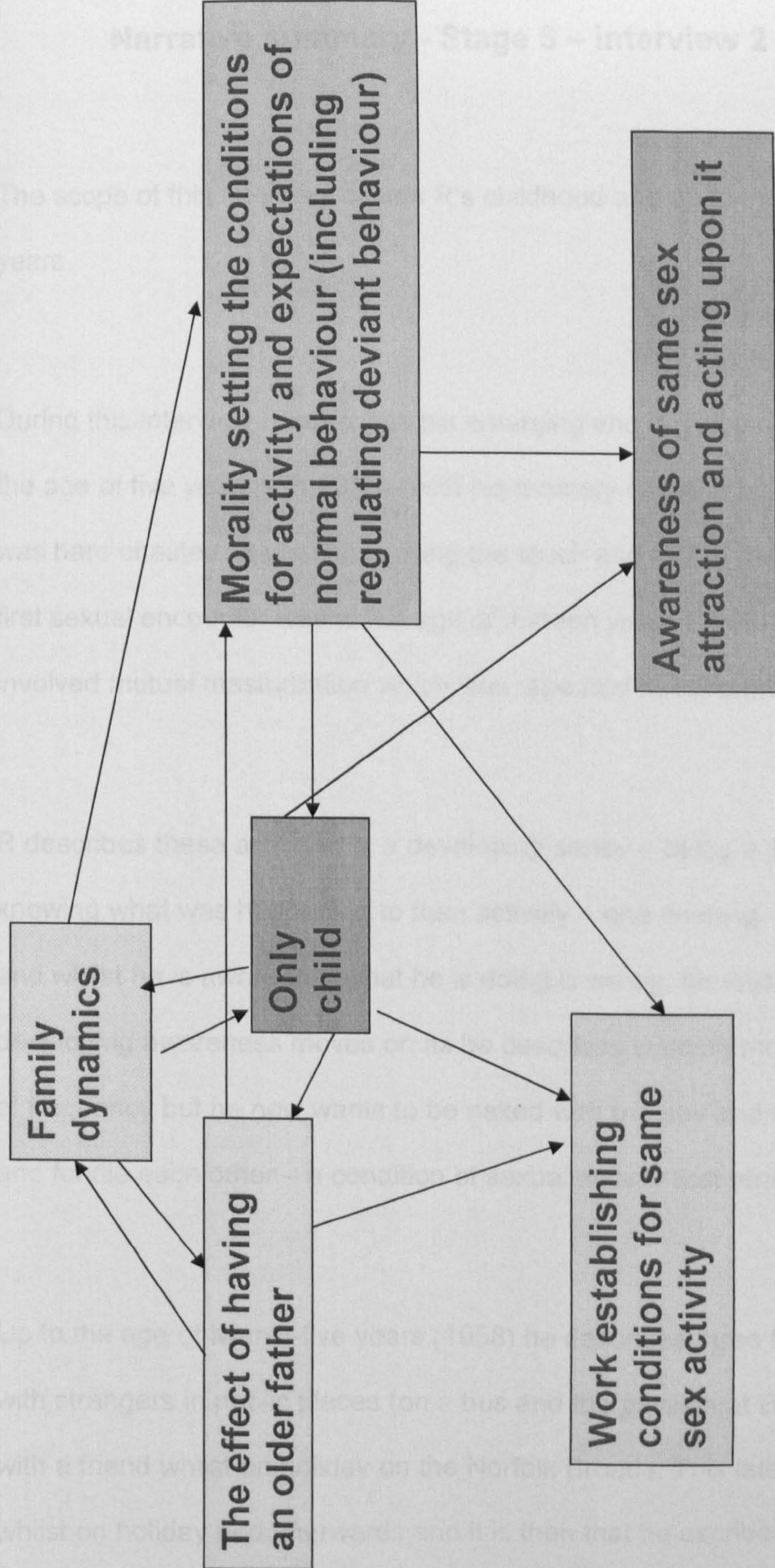
2005

Structure and agency – early childhood through to early adulthood – 5 years to 25 years

The effect of having an older father <ul style="list-style-type: none">Differential socialisation into the adult male world – consequence of not having a younger fatherThe affect of having an older father on agency – different upbringing	Family dynamics <ul style="list-style-type: none">Family in rented accommodation (not unusual for that period) but owners identity ascribed nationality/religious status – implicit Italians were better than Jews – Structural construction of group identity with agency not liking the Jewish owners and then moving – the issue is getting on wellStructure imposing retirement on agency – change in family dynamic as mother becomes wage earner	Awareness of same sex attraction and acting upon it <ul style="list-style-type: none">Agency – acting as sexualised being - attraction to male bodies - then engaging in same age/same sex sexual contactSeeking sexual contact affirming agency
Only child <ul style="list-style-type: none">Presentation of image of only child – lonelyHappy childhood – positive image of childhood		Morality setting the conditions for activity and expectations of normal behaviour (including regulating deviant behaviour) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Russell Square – very well known gay male cruising areaSexualised activity in private – structure imposing constraints on agencyStructure establishing expectations on agency and agency establishing expectations in conformityStructure imposing sanctions on agencyStructure restricting access to knowledge for deviant agencyStructure imposing on agency expectations of the normThe normality and expectations of heterosexualityStructure creating the conditions for same sex contact but agency not taking advantage or confirming to the rule/boundaries
Work establishing conditions for same sex activity <ul style="list-style-type: none">Agency being exposed to influences by structureThe conditions of the world of work – structure imposing on agency and the nature of the relationships which were to be established – however his isolation seems to be in contradiction to the required condition – camaraderie – could this because he is maintaining a secret and therefore doesn't want anybody close to him?The normality and expectations of heterosexualityStructure creating the conditions for geographic separation but also chronological separation so younger man works with older man who is his tutor – ignores the potential of same sex relationships within this relationshipStructure creating the conditions for geographic separation but also chronological separation so younger man works with older man who is his tutor – ignores the potential of same sex relationships within this relationshipStructure creating the conditions for same sex contact but agency not taking advantage or confirming to the rule/boundaries		

Fifth stage of analysis transcription of taped interview of Robert 13th July

2005 – structure and agency



Narrative summary - Stage 6 – interview 2 of Robert

The scope of this interview covers R's childhood and up to the age of twenty-five years.

During this interview R describes his emerging and developing sexuality starting at the age of five years – in 1938 – with his memory of being held by his father who was bare chested. R describes liking the touch and feel of his father's skin. His first sexual encounter was at the age of thirteen years (1946) with a peer and involved mutual masturbation which was repeated about a month later.

R describes these activities in a developing sense – being a participant but not knowing what was happening to then actively – one evening - seeking this boy out and whilst he is aware that what he is doing is wrong, he enjoys the contact. This developing awareness moves on as he describes wanting more – not in the sense of frequency but he now wants to be naked with the boy and wants them to cuddle and fondle each other – a condition of sexual activity that remains with him.

Up to the age of twenty-five years (1958) he describes three further contacts – two with strangers in public places (on a bus and the pavilion at Brighton) and the third with a friend whilst on holiday on the Norfolk Broads. This later contact is repeated whilst on holiday and afterwards and it is then that he ascribes the term gay to himself.

R maintains that through this period he has very little sexual contact – describing himself as asexual and as having little interest in sex. As a result he neither seeks out sexual contact nor is aware of the opportunities for this activity. This is despite the fact that he has lived in a notorious cruising area and has been in the army undertaking national service. This reported lack of interest is linked to dissociation with gay men – he reports reading about the trial of Lord Montague of Beaulieu but does not associate himself with these men.

The world of work is not employed by R to engage with men for the purposes of sexual activity. He describes limited social contact with his peers through work – he is apprenticed – and remains as he describes a loner – a bit of an oddity.

He is an only child whose father was aged sixty years when he was born. His father works for the [name] Church but had to retire when R was eight or nine years old (1941/42) not only because of age but also because his father was developing dementia. This narrative features his relationship with his much older father which he presents negatively whilst maintaining his childhood was on the whole happy. His mother – who becomes very influential later in his life, is barely mentioned in this interview.

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